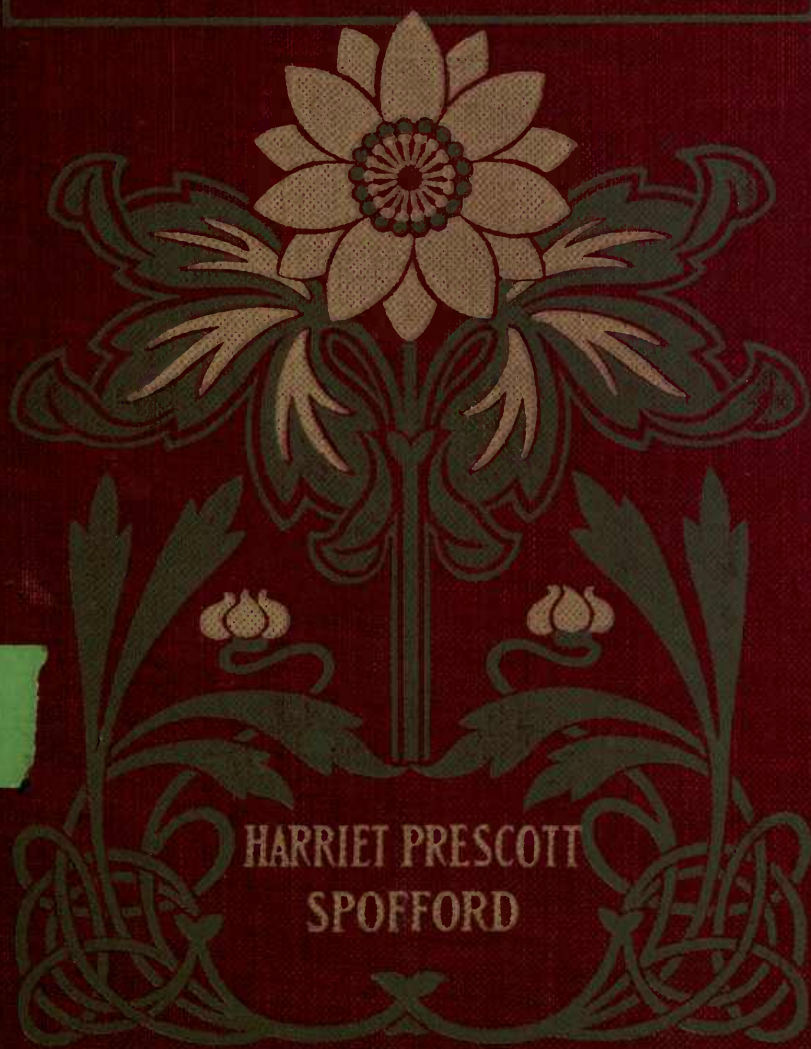


HESTER STANLEY'S FRIENDS



HARRIET PRESCOTT
SPOFFORD

HESTER STANLEY'S FRIENDS.

HARRIET PRESCOTT SPOFFORD'S STORIES FOR GIRLS

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HESTER STANLEY'S FRIENDS.

BY

HARRIET PRESCOTT SPOFFORD.

Illustrated

By FRANK T. MERRILL.

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CONTENTS.

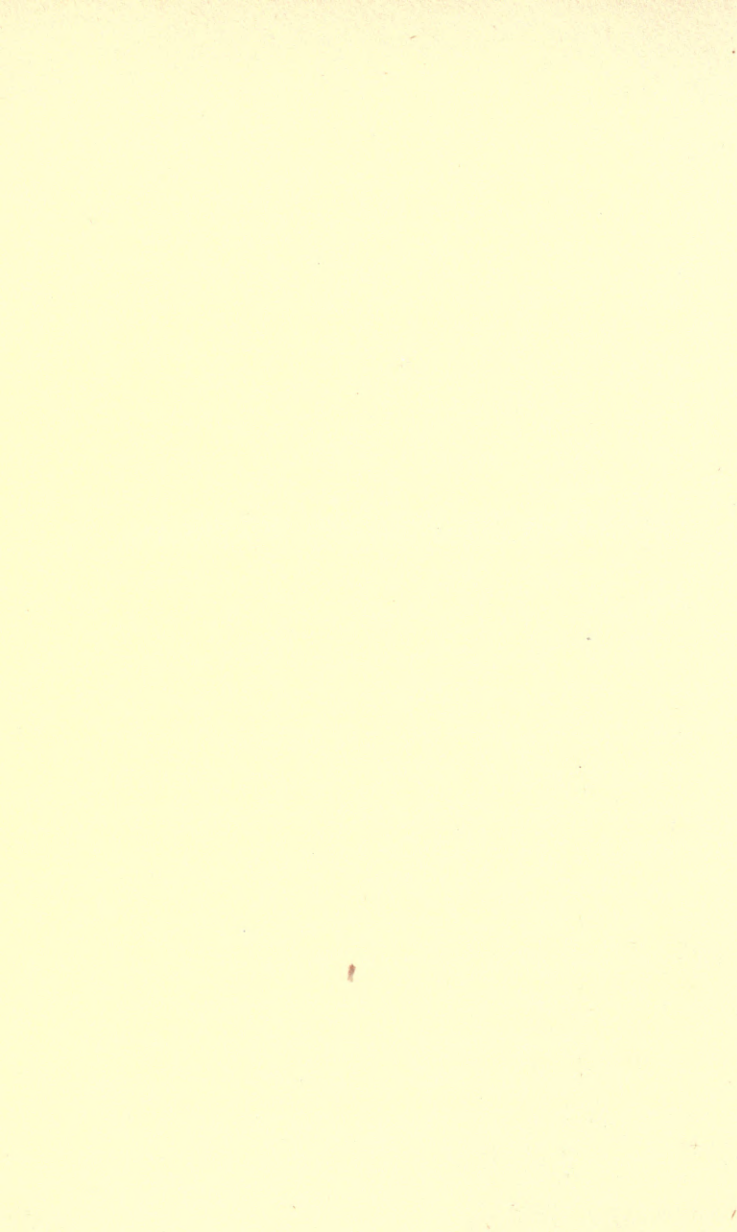
	PAGE
BELLA'S CHOICE	3
A CHRISTMAS THAT WAS CHRISTMAS	29
JULE'S GARDEN	61
APRIL SHOWERS	83
RAFE	107
THE LITTLE BLACK FIDDLE	129
BILLY AND HIS GRANDMOTHER	145
REMADE	173
THE FOURTH AT MARCIA MEYER'S	201
LITTLE ROSALIE	231
AT OLD BENBOW	265

ILLUSTRATIONS.

FROM DRAWINGS BY FRANK T. MERRILL.

- "MRS. TENTERDEN CAME UP ONE OF THE WALKS
WITH HER ARMS FULL OF GREAT WHITE
LILIES" *Frontispiece*
- "'FOR A DOLLAR?' ASKED THE FLORIST, SMIL-
ING" *Page 76*
- "THEN THE WALLS OF THE ROOM WERE VIBRANT
ABOUT THEM, AND SIGNOR PAZZANI WAS
PLAYING ON THE LITTLE BLACK FIDDLE" . 140
- "'NEVER MIND THAT,' SAID THE DOCTOR, SITTING
DOWN ON A STUMP" 175

HESTER STANLEY'S FRIENDS.



HESTER STANLEY'S FRIENDS.

BELLA'S CHOICE.

WHEN Bella Brook left St. Mark's for home, it was with but a vague idea of what home was, for she had not been there in all of four or five years, having usually spent the vacations with Mrs. Tenterden, an old friend of her own father's. Her home was several hundred miles away, and it had been thought unwise that she should make such a journey three or four times a year.

In reality it had been unwise to let her go instead to Mrs. Tenterden's, for it was not only accustoming her to a way of life different from anything she had had in the past, or was likely to have in the future, but it was weaning her from the old associations, from the mother and

the children, and separating her even from the chance of learning to love and be loved by the step-father there.

How delightful it was, though, the last time she went to Mrs. Tenterden's! A coach had taken her at the station, and rolled out along wide highways and into green lanes, and at length had entered the avenue of ancient cedars, gnarled in wrestling with perhaps ten thousand storms, and at the portico Mrs. Tenterden, in her floating muslins, had hurried down the steps to meet her with open arms, and Adrian and Louis at the same time had come in from their gallop on the sands, and Evelyn and Rosa had run up from the terrace, with its great urns and vases heaped with flowers and overlooking the sea. And then the girls had taken her up to her room, and Mrs. Tenterden had a new dress of soft white wool, with broad ribbons, ready for her to put on as soon as she had emerged, under the hands of Fifine, the maid, from the dust and soil of her journey; and a little later they had all had tea on the terrace as the moon rose and the sun set, and the soft purple twilight put on a sort of

glory with the splendor of the heavens and the shimmer of the sea ; and then they had lingered, telling the school news and the family news, with the flower scents floating about them, till the sound of the surf booming below had slowly silenced them, and then they had all gone in to sweet sleep and lovely dreams.

The next morning how perfect was the sunshine pouring over the sheer velvet lawns and through the crimson flames of the roses ; how sweet was the breath of the honeysuckle ; how intoxicating the full soft wind blowing apart the curtains ; how delicious all the sense of light and beauty and luxury !—the sense, too, that here she could stay indefinitely if she would ; here, where there were no lesson bells, no teachers, no hours, no bonds, no restraints at all, but just delightful pleasure and rest and idleness ! Well, she was a little tired, and that must be her excuse if pleasure seemed too pleasant.

Mrs. Tenterden, in a loose burnoose of some creamy stuff, held about her throat by a gold cord and tassel, came up one of the walks with her arms full of great white lilies. How beauti-

ful she was!—still a young woman, and a very wealthy one, who had wished to adopt Bella at the time of her father's death, and had compromised with the mother on permission to have Bella in the vacations, and had made those vacations seem to Bella like life in fairy-land. As she looked at her, Bella was conscious that she admired Mrs. Tenterden much as she did the sky, the sea, the roses and lilies; and that she loved her beyond every one in the world but Miss Marks. Her mother, of course, first; but that was a part of herself. She felt a little shy concerning her mother; she was only sixteen, and she had not seen her mother for nearly five years.

“You think we do nothing here but suck the honey out of the flowers,” said Mrs. Tenterden, as Bella sprang to take part of the armful, and put them into the tall vases waiting in the hall, through whose length and breadth this sweet wind was rioting with curtains and draperies. “Now I am going to tell you. *I* was up at sunrise, and such a pageant you never saw, unless you have been up at a July sunrise too. It put

me in mind to-day of what the sunrise might have been the morning after the 'Midsummer-Night's Dream.'"

That was one of the charms of Mrs. Tenterden, Bella thought, that she talked to you at sixteen just as she would have talked if you had been thirty-six. "Now," said Mrs. Tenterden, "as soon as you have breakfasted, the phaeton is coming round, and I am going to run down and see my poor people—at least nobody is poor such a morning as this; it's enough just to be in the world if you are not in suffering or pain—but my poorer people; and perhaps you will go with me, and we can talk it over on our way. I mean to have the 'Midsummer-Night's Dream' played on the terrace here, and with all the music too."

And then Evelyn and Rosa and Adrian came in; and Louis, who had breakfasted with his mother hours before,—as he said, twenty-four hours,—had another cup of coffee; and Mrs. Tenterden took a glass of milk, that she might be rebuking no one by thought of her earlier repast; and Mrs. Vane and Miss Morley, who

were visiting at Clifftop, appeared, having breakfasted in their rooms; and Bella hardly knew, when the phaeton came round, whether she would rather stay with the gay party on the morning porch or go with the ponies and Mrs. Tenterden. But all the same, she went; and the hoofs of Louis's horse were presently to be heard after them.

What a pleasant way it was to do good! Bella thought. Here was the hamper that the house-keeper had put up, with its closely fastened jars of soup that the cook had prepared, with the jellies, the delicately sliced bread, the tiny butter balls, the cutlet for this one, the strawberries for that, the roll of flannel for the old man's knees, the little dresses that the girls had made at their leisure for the new baby, the hot-water bag for the sick old woman, the paper novels that they were done with at the house, to be left here and there wherever there was a reader, and the rest of the phaeton heaped with roses for dropping at this door and that, as if one marked one's way with flowers. Now they stopped, and a child at the gate took what they left there; now they

went inside a door and chatted with the person that met them; now Mrs. Tenterden left Bella, and Louis tied his horse and came and sat in the phaeton while his mother delayed with some particular case that needed cheering or the ten minutes' reading of a Psalm; everywhere they left the roses; and at last they drove home through a wood where the horses' feet sounded as if they trod on velvet, where they could see lanes of sunlight down green mossy depths, as if leading to lands of enchantment, and hear the song of birds too shy for open air and not yet hushed to noonday quiet.

"It is the very wood where Titania and Peasblossom and Cobweb and the others held their revellings, is it not?" said Mrs. Tenterden. "Here, Louis,"—as he overtook them,—“now come here and advise with your mother—you are the practical one—and tell me how we can turn the sea-terrace into the Athenian forest, and where we can get our players, and who shall be Helena, and who Demetrius, and who Nick Bottom, and who Oberon, and where we shall find the music—Mendelssohn's music, you know.”

Just out of school, with all its tasks and constraints, gentle and uplifting as the life at St. Mark's had been, what freedom and light surrounded these bright days for Bella! But she used to wish for Marcia and Hester to help her con her part of the play; she used to wish for them on purple evenings when she leaned over the parapet to watch the stars break in the sea as it creamed up the beach below; she used to wish for them in the mornings when she and Rosa and Adrian, the groom sedately behind, went galloping their ponies through the wood, where every now and then the sea broke into sight upon the left, and on the right the water-lilies bloomed in the still pools where green sunshine seemed to fall.

And certainly she wished for Hester and Marcia when at last came the festival night of the play on the terrace — a clear dark night without a moon. Real trees were brought in from the forest and guyed in place, and the conservatories were half emptied of their palms and oleanders and camellias and long banner-like banana-trees to make the greenery; real theatre people man-

aged the lights ; and there was a part of the Symphony Orchestra hidden in the green for the music ; the guests were coming and going and rustling and exclaiming ; Mrs. Tenterden and Mrs. Vane were directing everything ; and Miss Morley and her lovers were making a by-play of their own. It seemed to Bella, in the midst of it all, that she was no young girl playing a part, but a captive loosed, a bird set free, a spirit of the air itself. And the music, the all but heavenly music, that had in it the murmuring of the leaves, the sparkling of the forest dew, the twittering of the fays, the passion of the lovers, the beauty of night, and Athens, and fairy-land, and love, all mingled together like the breath of many flowers in one delicious odor—when this music added itself to all the rest, she was so beside herself with the delight of the whole thing that if she had had many lines to say she would have forgotten every one of them. And when, after it was all over, Louis and Rosa stole down the cliff path with her to the beach, and walked slowly along till they saw a boat, and put out in that, Louis rowing them, till

there was nothing about them but the purple heaven full of stars, their rays breaking in the purple sea, nothing to be heard but the dip of the oars and the soft wide singing of the sea itself to drown out remembrance of the music — then it was all like a dream, from which Bella knew she must presently awake to reality.

A week later, at the close of three days and nights of hot and dusty travel, the train stopped at the place where her mother lived, and which she had always called her home, and on the first glance at which she could not help exclaiming, "Poor mother! oh, poor mother!"

There was no one to meet her at the station; there was no hack there at all; she had to leave her trunks with the baggage-master, who promised to send them with a man and a wheelbarrow; and she inquired her way on foot to Mrs. Parmenter's — for that had been her mother's name since the second marriage. She found the house at last, almost picturesque with some trees and some grass, and a general absence of paint, but shabby and ill kept to the point

of disgust, with slats gone from the loose blinds, window-panes broken, doors hanging on broken hinges, and fences down in spots. A child on whose face there was not a clean spot to kiss sat in the path making mud-pies with a spoon, but did not give way for her; another, a little younger, stared at her with its thumb in its mouth and its kitten held upside down; and a third, face and tier daubed with molasses, leaned from the open window, trying how far she could reach out and not break her neck.

Was this her mother's home? Were those two the children born since she had been at school? Was this one in the molasses the little Ally whom she had left such a fair white darling in the cradle? Was that person lounging in a hammock made of a piece of sacking and a barrel stave, without a waistcoat under his drab linen blouse, reading a paper and smoking a pipe, the man who had married her mother—her step-father? Was this her own sister Flossy leaping down the stairs to meet her, with holes in her stockings, with no collar on, with her hair in a matted snarl? Was this Ben, her big brother,

pushing back his chair and tripping over a hole in the carpet, looking a little less like a gentleman than his step-father? Was this — Oh, goodness, no more of it! But they were dismal facts, — the hall, with great stains on the paper; the stairs, with half the carpet-rods gone and the carpet bulging loosely; the doors banged and battered; the slatternly servant-girl, whose hair had never been combed, whose gown had never been washed, all sozzled and drozzled with dish-water and kerosene and fat and dirt. But where, oh, where was her mother, where was her mother? And Bella burst into tears, and ran past them all up the stairs to her mother's room, where Mrs. Parmenter lay prostrate and half dead with one of her headaches, that she used to say produced torment and threatened idiocy.

But it was of no use to cry. The children must think it was from joy and excitement at getting home again — oh, getting home again! The mother must not be disturbed by a thought of any kind with that trip-hammer of pain falling on her temples.

Bella was to share Flossy's room, and when

she had been welcomed by her step-father, and had found a place clean enough to kiss on the cheeks of the little ones, she went and took off her things, and proceeded to open her trunks, which had arrived, most of the children pushing and edging into the room and gaping open-mouthed at the operation, only uttering thrilled ohs and ahs as Bella shook out her white frocks and her dainty tea-gowns — all Mrs. Tenterden's gifts — and lifted tray after tray to find something suitable to wear without soiling in the dusty confusion of the house.

"My goodness! what a closet!" she exclaimed, as she opened the door. "Please get me a duster, Flossy. Mercy! there's no end to the dust. Where's Bridget? Is that her name? Can't she come and wash this place, so that I can hang up my gowns?"

"She won't," said Flossy.

"Won't? Why not, pray?"

"She won't; that's all about it. Ma's sick all the time, and she has to do everything."

"Then I'll do it myself," said Bella.

"You!"

"Somebody must. We shall return to the dust of which we were made, at this rate." And presently she had a scrubbing-pail and a cloth, and had emptied that closet, and washed down its walls, and wiped up its floor, and felt a thrill of satisfaction, although her delicate hands were smarting and her heart was really aching.

"I don't like to hang my nice things on these walls," she said then. "I wonder if there is n't a sheet I can have;" and she went with the children to find one. "But not like this," she said.

"They're all like this," said Flossy.

"I mean a whole one."

"There is n't a whole one in the house," said Bessy.

And Bella sat down and sewed up the rip in one, and hemmed over the corners of another, and hung one under and one over the dresses, and shut the closet door, and proceeded to the bureau. "Oh, what a mess!" she cried.

"I'm going to give the two upper drawers to you," said Flossy.

"Well," said Bella, feeling despair hanging just over her, "we'll put the whole thing to

rights." And the bureau was cleared and wiped, and the drawers set in order, and the gifts she had brought for the family distributed, to their infinite delight, — a delight which touched Bella almost to tears, those children must have had so little, — and then they all went down together.

It had been pathetic to Bella to see that pleasure over her small gifts, — small, because as Mrs. Tenterden had been at the expense of her education and wardrobe and everything else while at St. Mark's, Bella had not felt it quite right to spend a great deal of her money for the gifts; but the doll she had dressed herself was hugged to Kitty's heart with rapturous glee; the little stereoscope and its photographs gave Bessy as much pleasure as a trip through a European gallery would have given herself; Ben took his Macaulay with a hungry avidity that gave her a real pain to see; Tommy would have been in a state of bliss with his piccolo if the mother's headache had allowed him to use it; and Flossy received her parasol entirely regardless of the fact that she had n't an article of wearing apparel fit to associate with it.

Things were no better downstairs. The parlor had been gradually dismantled to replace the destruction of articles in the sitting-room, so that its doors were closed, — the only doors that were closed, or that would close, in the house, by the way. The sitting-room carpet was little better than a rag; the ceiling had been smoked in rings every here and there by the lamps; there was a great spot on the wall where Mr. Parmenter leaned his hand in changing his slippers, which were kept behind the stove in an accumulation of fluffy dust, and another spot where ink had spattered; the paint of the mantelpiece was blistered, and had peeled off in places; one of the table legs was broken; there was not a whole chair in the room; the looking-glass had a crack in it; the windows were thick with dust and finger-marks inside and splashes of rain outside; and in the open drawer of the table between them was a dirty comb and brush. The dining-room — But words fail. When Bella saw the table set for tea, with its soiled and crumpled cloth, its cracked and nicked and smoked and mismated dishes, no napkins, no order, the chil-

dren elbowing and pushing and grabbing, their own spoons in the sugar, their own knives in the butter, it was impossible for her to eat a morsel, and she went out into the kitchen, which, as she remembered the snow-white tables, the spotless floors, the shining range, the glittering rows of pans in Mrs. Tenterden's kitchen the only time she was ever inside it, seemed to her squalor itself. There she made a slice of French toast, and took it up with a cup of tea to her mother.

"Ah, how nice that is!" sighed the mother, as she saw the tray, which Bella had contrived to find, covered with the only clean napkin she could lay her hands on. "How good it is! Bridget never makes a cup of tea like that; you must have made it yourself, dear." And Bella, dimly comprehending her mother's helplessness and disappointment, felt her heart ready to break, and longed to be a comfort to her. She combed out her mother's long and pretty hair then, and got some water and cooled her face and her hands for her, and coaxed her into the chair while she freshened and made the bed. "Oh," said the mother, "you are going to be

such a comfort to me. I ought to have some compensation for all I have been through."

Bella cried herself to sleep that night, thinking of her mother, and pitying and loving her, and pitying Flossy too, and her big brother Ben, and feeling already a yearning affection for the little half brothers and sisters, and longing to be of use to them.

"Is n't it time for school?" she asked the next morning.

"Oh, we don't go to school," said Flossy, shamefacedly.

"Don't! Oh, why not?"

"Well, there is n't any very near, and our clothes, you see," said Flossy, making a downward and outward motion of her hands that expressed plainly as words the whole state of disrepair. "Ben is trying to study all by himself, and sometimes I hear the primer lessons, and sometimes ma hears me."

"Oh dear, dear!" said Bella; "that is n't any way. I think you will all have to come to school to me. My box of school-books will be handy now, and we'll have a school-room pleas-

ant days out under the apple-trees and rainy days in my room." And the idea, perhaps owing to its novelty, was at once acquiesced in, a solemn compact being made from which it should not be possible to withdraw. "But first," said Bella, "we must help Bridget clear up;" and she found the stub of a broom, which was all the broom there was, and swept the floors herself. "I should n't mind it," she thought, "if it were for theatricals, and I'm sure these are theatricals." And then she apportioned a share of the dusting to Flossy and Bessy, and afterward had them go upstairs with her and try and make the beds decent, for the mother was occupied with the baby, nursing which was about all she could do when she did n't have a headache. "If we make our beds," said Bella, "and do the dusting and mending, it leaves time for Bridget to do the heavier work, don't you see?" And of course, led off by Bella just from school, looking to them so exquisite in her fresh pink print and clean ruffle, they were willing and ready to do all she wished; and when, after what she called a scrap and scramble dinner, they found

her on her knees sewing up the holes in the old carpet, it did n't seem so hard to Flossy and Bessy to give an hour themselves to darning table-cloths and mending sheets and pillow-cases and their own underwear before they swarmed out to play again.

But it was up-hill work. What little property there was to live upon was in trust for the mother, and Mr. Parmenter had nothing to do with it; thus they were sure of enough shelter and food and fire. Mr. Parmenter was very good-natured, and kept himself in what he called his office most of the time. But when, in a few weeks, Bella's attempt at tidying the house slowly dawned on him, and he realized that the children had clean faces and clean tiers and smooth hair at table, and saw Bella washing and wiping windows and trying to cover the stains on the wall, he seemed spurred to some unusual exertion, for a paper-hanger and white-washer one day appeared and made a new thing of the downstairs region, and another day a carpet came home that, if its colors set Bella's teeth on edge, was at least whole and clean; and

it was some satisfaction to observe that her stepfather approved of her, and was willing to help her after a fashion all he could, while her mother seemed to feel that an angel had come into the house and no less. Bella used to think sometimes that probably she would become an angel if things went on without mending : if Kitty bit Ally, and Ally scratched Tommy, and Tommy pinched Bessy, and Bessy made faces at Flossy, and Flossy slapped Bessy, and Ben grumbled and growled at the whole of them. Yet she thought she saw the least slight ray of improvement — and patience, who knew? Still she did not dare remember the sweet decorum and happiness of St. Mark's and Waterways, the bright luxurious gayety of Clifftop and Mrs. Tenterden. She had not heard from Clifftop, moreover, for so long that she felt as if they might have forgotten her.

She was thinking of this one day, with her eyes just one big tear, when Mr. Parmenter brought her a letter. It was from Mrs. Tenterden ; it had about it still that sweet odor of violets which was about all her things. Bella

could have kissed it as she turned it over, and held it a moment before breaking the pretty seal. In this letter Mrs. Tenterden wrote that Bella had been left undisturbed during all these weeks, in order that she might acquire perfect knowledge on which to make her decision, and now the choice was offered to her to stay where she was, or go to Mrs. Tenterden's and be her own daughter. "My own," wrote Mrs. Tenterden, "in everything; sharing with Evelyn and Rosa and Adrian and Louis while I live and after I die, with my children for your brothers and sisters, with my love for you, with yours for me."

While Bella read the words the vision rose of the lovely home at Clifftop, the precision and order and luxury, the beautiful rooms, the silent servants, the glimmering of the sea, — vision, too, of the city life in winter, with its Symphony concert and *matinée*, with its flower mission, its reading in the hospital, and with the affection of Rosa and Evelyn, of Adrian and Louis, and Mrs. Tenterden's surrounding grace and sweetness and beauty, — a life of goodness made easy, of pleasure, of power; and she seemed to hear that

hidden music of the "Midsummer-Night's Dream" pulsing through the whole of it. And dimly as she mused, across her reverie came her mother's weak voice, fretting because Kitty would not let the baby alone; because Tommy would not have his face washed; because Ally had no clean gown to put on; because Bessy would n't lay down her fairy-book, and take Tommy and put him to sleep. And Bella roused herself to see Flossy, smart with soiled ribbons, strolling off with that flaunting Ewers girl; to see her step-father vainly struggling to get his hand into his sleeve through the torn lining; to see Ben worried and perplexed with his slate and problem. "Oh no," she said to herself; and presently she wrote to Mrs. Tenterden: "One day I shall die, I suppose — everybody does — and go to heaven, maybe, and heaven then will seem no lovelier to me than life with you does now. It makes me cry. I don't know how I shall bear it. But of course I can; and by-and-by I shall be happy. I have been away too long; and no, oh no, I cannot go, for I am needed. It is a great thing to be needed; and my duty is here."

A CHRISTMAS THAT WAS
CHRISTMAS.

A CHRISTMAS THAT WAS CHRISTMAS.

WHEN Hester went home with Marcia Meyer for the Christmas holidays, she took with her several crisp bank-bills that Miss Marks gave her from the allowance her father had left for her, and some of the embroidery she had learned how to do of the nuns in her South Sea Island home, which looked like frost crystals laid on snow, and with which she meant to make a Christmas frock for the dear baby that had been named for her.

Mr. Meyer was at the station with the great family sleigh brimming with little Meyers, and it really seemed so delightful to Hester to be met by such a loving swarm of welcoming arms and smiles and voices, that she wondered how Marcia could bear to stay at school at all.

"Why, if you didn't go away," said Marcia, "you wouldn't know how good it is to come back."

"I was so afraid they would n't let you come," said Rosy, nestling close to Hester, after the robes had been tucked in, and feeling that her years were more on the level of Hester's friendship than Marcia's were.

"Why, of course they would when papa said to," exclaimed Agnes.

"That settles it," said Mr. Meyer. "Steady, Hassan!" — to one of the prancing horses. "The world trembles when papa nods — all except the world under his own roof. No, John, you can't have the reins. I shall put you over on the back seat among the girls, sir, if you don't let them alone. The horses are restive enough now."

And the horses had their heads down, and the fences were skimming by, and the snow was spinning from their heels in big snowballs over the dasher, and John and Bert were whooping as if they were cow-boys riding the mule in a circus, and all at once they turned a short corner, and there was a vast soft snow-bank, and

over went the sleigh, and out tumbled children, robes, satchels, snowballs, screams, laughter, and all; and when they scrambled from the powdery drift the horses stood hanging their heads meekly, and Mr. Meyer, reins in hand, was ringing out a great laugh.

"I could n't have done any worse if I had had the reins myself," exclaimed John, shaking the snow out of his collar, and helping to tip the sleigh back.

"That's the way papa brings us up, Hester," cried Marcia, climbing in again. "Lets us tumble up, you see."

But Hester thought it was all part of the play, and presently, comfortably bestowed again, they skimmed along till they reached a dim pine wood, where the motion of the horses shook down soft showers of snow from the low branches through which the sunset showed like embers of a dying fire, and from under which they came out on the frozen lake, dashing along the smooth surface with their hoofs clicking like castanets.

Suddenly Mr. Meyer pulled up the horses to avoid running down a party of children on the

ice, — a tiny fellow dragging a smaller child on a board, and a girl with a shawl over her head and about her arms running along beside them, with now a step and now a slide, blue with cold, but her laugh gay as a bird's song.

"They're going to get on the runners," screamed Rosy. "Don't let them, papa; oh, don't let them!"

"Whip behind!" cried Bert.

"Oh, papa! Aren't you ashamed, Rosy?" cried Marcia. "Do let them! Here, catch on, boy! Now give me your hand"—to the girl. "Go slow, papa, please; let her tumble right in here with us; there's so many of us, we'll keep each other warm. And see! the baby'll fall off that board if the horses start. What a pretty baby! What great blue eyes! Here, hand her over, son. Now, you see, you can hold on there."

And as the boy caught on for answer, the little girl and the half-frightened smaller child were tucked in among them, and the horses were making their best rate of speed down the lake.

"Didn't you ever have a sleigh-ride before?"

asked Marcia of the little girl. "Don't crowd that way, Agnes."

"No, 'm."

"Nor I, either," said Hester, leaning gently toward the child, smiling at her with her own great dark eyes, and taking one of her cold hands into her muff.

"You!" said the child. "Lor', 'm!" as if that were something unnatural. "But sometimes," she added, to present the best side of her case, "Ben takes me on the board. And sometimes I take him — only it's heavy. He's going to make a sled," she continued her confidences presently, "when he gets a hammer and some nails. He's got a knife, a real beauty of a jack-knife, and he's whittled out the runners. He can use a stone instead of a hammer when he gets the nails."

"I'll give him some nails," said Bert, leaning back.

"Take care, Bert, you'll fall!"

"I've got lots of nails," said Bert. "They're not all crooked. We pick 'em up to trade with the fellows."

"We've asked Santa Claus to," said the little girl, timidly. "We've written him a letter, and sent it on the wind, and we've told him up the chimney; only our chimney is a funnel, and may not reach him. But of course he could throw nails down a funnel, you know."

"And is that all you want Santa Claus to bring you?" asked Marcia.

"Yes, 'm; I—I guess so," said the little girl, looking up with wondering eyes.

"Oh, dear, dear!" cried Marcia. "Just hear that, Hester, and look at her! And here am I wanting a silver dog-collar, and a châtelaine, and a sealing-wax set, and a bonbonnière, and —"

"You'd better talk about being unselfish, Marcia," cried Rosy, whose conscience was in trouble, "when there wouldn't be anything left for the rest of us if you had all those. And Rafe's been longing for a set of 'British Ballads' and you know I want a davenport for my room, and papa's half promised me a gold chain and locket."

"Then I shall have a gold chain and locket too," exclaimed Agnes. "I don't know but I'd

prefer all the Abbott books. And Helen wants a purse, with a big gold piece and some postage-stamps in it; and Mabel expects a French doll with real hair, that shuts its eyes, and — ”

“And I’ve put in for a bicycle, and Bert for a new pair of skates,” exclaimed John, whirling himself about. “And Bert and I want — ”

“Oh, hold on !” said their father. “You want the earth !”

And then he turned the horses and drove back so fast against the wind that it was all they could do to hold their breath and not waste any more till they left the little strangers at the opening of the woods on the shore, where their home was to be seen, and stopped at last at the door of their own large old-fashioned house, with the red roof gleaming among the bare elm boughs. And there, with Helen and Mabel and Georgie and Tot to welcome them in the blazing firelight of the hall, and the mother and Miss Persis hurrying downstairs from Rafe, and Charlotte Risley running across the street to make another, it seemed to Hester that there was no such place in all the world as Marcia’s home.

It was the next morning, when Miss Persis went out to walk with Marcia and Hester, Charlotte Risley coming along, that the twins, Helen and Agnes, seeing Rosy put on her cloak to follow, insisted upon making part of the company too, picking up John with his sled as they went, and following the older ones, who were making their way to the little house in the wood by the lake-side.

"Indeed," said Miss Persis, "this will never do. I can't go to see people in want with an army with banners."

"Oh, we'll stay outside," said John.

"John, you are really the last one I want."

"I shall go, just the same," said John. "And I dare say you'll be tired enough to be hauled home on my sled, Miss Persis."

So they went along through the wintry wood, sliding and running and singing, stopping to listen to the echo, and to gather the lovely feathery ghosts of grasses and the long stems of seed-vessels appearing through the snow, to look after a darting squirrel and a fleet rabbit; and then they came to the forlorn little house with a

funnel out of one window, and an old hat and some rags in the broken panes of another, and Miss Persis and Marcia and Hester went in, leaving the rest outside.

There was a great contrast between the gay little people tying hemlock boughs to their feet for snow-shoes, trying to walk, falling backward, shouting and screaming with laughter, and the scene within the house, where the father of the children taken into the sleigh the evening before lay powerless to lift his head, and the mother, with helpless knees, unable to walk or stand, had to hitch herself about as she could to do the work; where the wood to be burned was only such as Mamy and Ben could bring in green from the forest, where they were now gone for some; where all the food was some meal, the milk of the cow that little Ben took care of, and the occasional egg of a half-starved Brahma hen; where the father had no medicine, the children no clothes, the mother no hope.

Miss Persis gave the mother the little coat of Bert's that she had brought, and Helen's outgrown cloak, and the beef and bread; and Mar-

cia felt dreadfully embarrassed when the poor woman cried, and murmured her thanks, and said she never thought it would come to this, and it had seemed as if they were forsaken, and if she only had the use of her feet to get about and do for the father it wouldn't be so bad, and that the children were all the life she had, and it broke her heart to look at them !

"She's such a pretty woman," said Marcia, when safely outside again, "and how that sick man's eyes did follow her!"

"Don't you suppose there is anything to be done for him?" asked Charlotte Risley, doubtfully.

"Probably, if he were taken to a hospital," said Miss Persis. "Not at home. I couldn't have supposed there was such poverty in our part of the world. They are so hidden in this wood. And those children growing up like barbarians; no church —"

"No school, no books, no toys," said Charlotte.

"I wish you would n't talk about it any more," said Marcia, scuffing the snow before her. "I

wish we had n't seen it. And just at Christmas-time too."

Sitting late that afternoon by Rafe's lounge, where the lame back still held him prisoner, in the room whose wide windows always let in so much of the sky, Hester found herself confiding to him her thoughts of the morning. "It was dreadful," she said.

"Oh, never mind that!" cried Marcia. "Look here at the sun in those distant windows, just a nest of rubies."

"I don't see," Hester went on regardlessly, "why poor people live here, where they have to suffer such things. My gentle South Sea savages, who never know what hunger and cold are, are a great deal happier."

"Only they are savages," said Rafe; "and these people are where their children can learn all there is to know, and be all there is to be. Only you'd rather be a savage than a sponge, and a poor person where there are books and schools than a savage."

"I did n't think of that," said Hester. "But why are people poor?"

Rafe laughed. "There you've touched the sore spot of the world. But we must do something for these people."

"It made me feel as if I had no right to my fur cloak," said Hester.

"Oh, come!" said Marcia.

"And certainly," persisted Hester, "as if I ought to be sewing for them instead of on this embroidery for the dear baby, who would be just as happy in something else."

"Your wonderful embroidery, Hester! I do believe you're crying, Hester," from Marcia.

"It — it makes you — to think of those children who have nothing, and would be so happy with a few nails," exclaimed Hester.

"I say," said Rafe, presently, "there's a lot of stuff wasted at Christmas."

"Oh, I knew it — I knew it was coming! I know just what you are going to say."

"For my part, I think if just the money that is wasted by the Meyer family in buying useless things that nobody wants," said Rafe, "or at any rate can do without, like your silver dog-collar, Marcia, your bon-bons, my 'British Ballads,' that

I really can have from the public library, Rosy's davenport, if that is what she's to have, and Agnes's gold chain and locket, — why, if the money for all that raff of things was saved and given to those What's-their-names, this Stuart family, it would send the father to a hospital, where he could be cured, and made fit to go to work again, and get a doctor and a wheel-chair for the mother, and clothes and food for the children enough to keep them comfortably the whole year."

"Oh!" cried Hester, "then — then it would be wicked —" She stopped, for she was on the point of censuring the possible doings of the Meyer family.

"Oh, you needn't stop!" said Marcia. "It will be wicked for me to have my gold-handled umbrella, my chatelaine, my what-and-all; for Agnes to have her locket; for mamma to have the jewelry papa always gives her at Christmas."

"Wicked is too much to say," said Rafe, falling back on his cushions. "But it would be lovely to have the money to give these Stuarts, wouldn't it? A few nails!"

“And it’s wicked for you to be sewing on that embroidery in this light, Hester Stanley,” said Marcia, giving Hester’s work a twitch. “We ought to have the lamps in, and be making a linsey-woolsey for that Mamy — Oh, dear! I wish we’d never gone sleighing up the lake.”

But Hester gathered up the work. “Miss Marks gave me twenty-five dollars of my allowance,” said she, “to buy my Christmas gifts with, because I have spent so little of it. But I know, Marcia, that you and Rafe and Charlotte would rather I gave it to those poor children than to you. But I shall finish this for my baby, because — because — oh, because I want to!” cried Hester, as if she must have one piece of wickedness for her share.

And then Miss Persis came and began to play to Rafe the music that she always played for him at twilight, — the dreamy music that carried his thoughts up to the stars as he saw them coming out through the wide window, that made his room a chamber of peace, and that always quieted dissensions among the dear stormy Meyer children.

"Hester has twenty-five dollars to spend on Christmas presents," said Marcia next day at the breakfast-table. "Get down, Beauty!" — to her black cat, — "I just gave you some; it's my turn now. Yes; and I've contrived to save five, and so has Rafe. How much have you, Rosy? And you, Helen?"

"I don't know if I care to say," said Rosy.

"Oh, don't you! I might have known. Well, Helen?"

"I — I have twenty-five cents," said Helen, bashfully.

"Dear, dear, you're almost as badly off as Mamy Stuart. And you, Agnes?"

"Oh, a whole boxful of nickels. I don't know how many. And Bert would have had more, but Mabel and Georgie tipped them down the crack of the garret floor."

"We can get them again. I don't suppose you've saved anything, John?"

"Not a penny," said John.

"Well, instead of parcelling hers out in little dribblets among us all, and getting things nobody really wants, — things not of much use, you

know, — Hester is going to do a world of good with her money, and give it all in one lump to those Stuart people."

"I didn't say quite that, Marcia," said Hester, gently. "I said I knew you and Rafe and Charlotte Risley would *rather* I did. But I don't know about Rosy and Agnes and Helen and John, and the rest. I don't know as I would have the right, quite," she said, turning her timid fawn's eyes on them each in turn, "to give away their presents unless they said so."

"Of course they'll say so."

Mr. Meyer glanced over the edge of his paper at his wife, who was making Tot's cambric tea, and she glanced back again, but neither of them spoke.

"I say so," said John.

"I — I don't know," said Rosy.

"If you are n't — "

"Oh, you can say it, Marcia Meyer," cried Rosy. "But it is n't anything of the sort. It's because I thought I'd like to have a present from Hester herself. And I was going to give her one."

"Give and take! You are one of the people who deceive themselves with an idea of their own virtue all the way through life."

"Marcia," said her mother, softly.

"Well, I suppose the Stuart children want clothes and food and schooling as much as you want a sentimental gift from Hester. Oh, how the girls at Waterways will rattle you when you get there!"

"No, indeed, Rosy," said Hester. "I shall be one of the big girls then, and I'll stand by you just as Marcia stands by me now."

"Well," said Rosy, "of course I'll do what you want me to, Hester. But—but you'll let us give you *our* presents, won't you?"

"If—if you don't mind," said Hester, "I think— Don't you think—it would be better to give them to Mamy and Ben and that baby there? It— Why, it would be queer for me to take your presents, and—and prevent you from having mine."

"Well—" began Marcia.

"You're always saying 'well,' Marcia," said Rosy, her irritation still uppermost.

"And you're always spilling things. You never *will* learn how to eat an egg. Besides, all's well that ends well. Well, now, what do you say? Give me my napkin-ring, Totty dearest. Blessed pinkums! Speak now, or else forever hold your peace. Shall Hester, instead of giving you Christmas presents, give the money to the suffering Stuart children? And shall you, instead of giving her any, do the same? Those contrary-minded will say no."

There was a gurgling and stammering of explanation and exclamation to be heard all round the table, and stopping suddenly, but somehow none of it made no.

"And that is only the beginning of it," said Marcia, folding her napkin. "I am not going to receive any Christmas presents this year, either. Papa and mamma were to give me a silver dog-collar, or a chatelaine chain, or something, and, instead, I am going to ask them to let me have the money to go with Hester's. A little girl from the South Sea Islands sha'n't have *all* the generosity there is in this house."

"Oh, Marcia!" from Hester.

"And so I sha'n't make any Christmas presents to you, either. At least —"

"Oh, Marcia," exclaimed Rosy, in bitterness of spirit, her face scarlet, "you're just going to spoil Christmas!"

"Spoil Christmas by making suffering people happy?"

"We have a right to our Christmas as well as they," spluttered Rosy, choking over her milk.

"Anybody would suppose presents made the whole of Christmas, and there was n't any church all dressed in green to enjoy, sweet as a pine wood, and the choir boys to sing, there was n't any dinner and pudding in blue fire, and games and — For my part I thought Christmas meant being glad Christ came, and we ought to keep it so as to make it seem like a day in heaven."

"We're living here," persisted Rosy.

"Well, if you can't get up the spirit to have Christmas without having all your miserliness gratified, you don't deserve Christmas! That's all I have to say."

"I'm glad of it. I hope you'll stay at Water-

ways next Christmas. You *know* I must do whatever you do, and let papa give them the price of my gold locket."

"You can wear a little ticket instead of the locket, saying, 'I gave my locket to the poor.'"

"You are going too far, are n't you, my dear?" said her father, looking up from his paper again a moment.

"I suppose so, papa dear. But I believe in heroic treatment as much as Miss Bwown does."

"Oh, I thought you loved me, Marcia!" sobbed Rosy.

"So I do, so I do, you poor dear!" cried Marcia, upsetting her chair, and running round to throw her arms about Rosy, who hid her face in Marcia's neck then, creating all the confusion proper to the Meyer meals, with the tablecloth half dragged off and a water carafe broken. "And you'll be the happiest in the end if you do just as Hester and I do. I know you!"

Suddenly, as Marcia returned to her seat, the tears were spurting out of Helen's eyes, and there was a sort of stifled wail from Agnes. "We've all got to do it if Marcia and John and

Rosy do. And I *wanted* my purse with the gold piece."

"Well, well, well," said Marcia, with disgust. "No one is obliged to do it. Besides, we did n't mean the little ones, anyway; only us big ones."

"I guess I'm big enough for it if John is!" cried Bert.

"Oh, Marcia, we're big enough too," cried Mabel and Georgie. "Don't leave us out—oh, please don't, Marcia!"

"And besides," continued Marcia, "it is only putting ourselves alongside of papa and mamma and Miss Persis, who make Christmases for others and get their fun out of that. Oh, when you see the Stuart children so surprised and glad and everything! Only think, nothing but Indian-meal mush to eat, and not enough of that. Perhaps they never tasted a butter-scotch in their lives. Why, we're all going to do it, I do declare!" she cried. "Who would have believed it? Aren't we a lovely family, after all, we Meyers?" And she upset her chair again, and ran round to her father this time, and hugged him with all her might.

"But," said her father, extricating himself from her embrace where no one could have told which was his beard or her hair, "your mother and I don't seem to have been consulted in this business. How do you know I want my child to go without such a necessary article as a silver dog-collar, or a gold chain and locket, or a seal ring—and what was all the rest?—in order that I may give the worth of them to Mr. Stuart's children?"

"Oh no, my dear," said Mrs. Meyer, from her end of the table and the muffler in which that always neuralgic face of hers was enveloped.

"But, Marcia," he said in an undertone, "I think we must except the little ones, Mabel and Georgie and —"

"I don't believe they'd like it, papa, when the time came, and they found they hadn't done just as we had."

"Tot?" said her father.

"Oh, papa!" cried Marcia, with another hug; "you are the best, the dearest, the kindest—I don't wonder mamma worships you."

"My dear, if you worship me," said Mr. Meyer,

raising his voice, "I will thank you for a little more incense. Marcia, take my coffee-cup to your mother, please." And then the mother had to be hugged half to death.

"Oh, I'm so delighted!" cried Marcia, hurrying back to the table with a pencil and an old letter envelope. "Hester, what a little trump you are! You began all this."

"No; Rafe did, Marcia."

"Now I'm going to see how much we have for the Stuarts. In the first place, Hester's twenty-five dollars. Twenty-five. My dog-collar, thirty."

"Oh, I could have got that for twenty," said her father.

"Not the best. And you give the best, you and motherkins. Rosy's davenport, eighteen; the gold locket for Agnes, too, eighteen more; and Helen's purse and eagle, fifteen. Then Rafe's 'British Ballads,' twenty-five; Bert's new skates — the old ones will do, Bert — five. Were you going to give John the bicycle really, papa? Yes? Oh, how splendid! That is eighty dollars; he'd break a cheaper one all to pieces, and

it would break him all to pieces too. Oh, you never will be content to go without that bicycle in the world, John !”

“ Yes, I will too.”

“ It means for always, John, you know. Not this year or next — ”

“ You count that bicycle in, Marcia Meyer. It's more than any of you. Next year'll take care of itself. And Laddy'll lend me his sometimes, anyway.”

“ Well. And books and toys and things for the rest — fifteen more. Two hundred and thirty-one dollars ! And my five, and your ten, Rosy — I guess it's about ten — and the box of nickels. Papa, does Christmas always cost you a couple of hundred dollars ?”

“ And more, too,” said Mr. Meyer, with a groan that made Hester look up and laugh. “ It's a regular ‘stand and deliver !’ There's my gift to your mother, you know, and what it costs me for your mother's gift to me,” he said, laughing.

“ Well, I suppose your gift to mamma would be about a hundred dollars. Or is that too low ?”

"Oh, by no means!" said the father. "You might say seventy-five."

"I'll say a hundred. And I suppose she was going to give you a dressing-gown that would cost fifty. A hundred and fifty. And now, Miss Persis?"

"Oh, I throw my fortunes into the general lot," said Miss Persis.

"That's hardly fair, Miss Persis," said Mr. Meyer.

"It was going to be a black silk, Miss Persis," murmured the mother.

A little flush mounted Miss Persis's pale cheek. "I'll make the old one answer," she said presently. "I should feel condemned to be having a new black silk with the suffering I saw yesterday unrelieved."

"Miss Persis, then," resumed Marcia. "She's not going to let us get ahead of her. How much does a black silk cost, mamma? Five hundred dollars?"

"Marcia! Fifty!"

"Well, now, let's see. Five and twenty-one—twenty-six; naught's naught; carry three. Four hundred and thirty-one dollars, papa!"

"Throw off the odd figures, Marcia," pleaded her father, his eyes sparkling.

"Oh no, indeed! After we've had a little conference as to what we were going to spend for each other, and Miss Persis and Charlotte and all, I rather think we shall make it up to five hundred. If it had only been fifty, it would have helped some. Hester shall be the treasurer."

"Oh no," whispered Hester; "Miss Persis, please."

"And let's see," went on Marcia, irrepressibly, "that will give the Stuart father six months in the hospital where they cure such things at ten dollars a week; and a wheel-chair for the mother to get round in, at twenty-eight —"

"And a sled for the boy, Marcia," cried John. "That boy shall have his sled. Sliding on an old board!"

"Yes. A thick new cloak and arctic boots for Mamy."

"And a barrel of flour, and some beans, and pease, and pork, and bacon, and —"

"And tea and sugar," said Mrs. Meyer.

"And 'Robinson Crusoe,'" said Bert.

"And the 'Girls' Own Fairy Book.'"

"And a doll."

"And, if you please," said Hester, "I think they would like a chimney. Does it cost much to build a chimney? Only fifteen or twenty dollars there? Oh, ever since I have been in the North it seems to me that everything is in a chimney."

"Oh, they won't know themselves," said Marcia. "And just think how lovely to give them such comfort and happiness, and to cure their father! Don't you begin to feel happier now, Georgie?"

"But it's going to be a very dry Christmas," said John. And then they adjourned upstairs, where Rafe was now ready to receive them and hear all about it.

But if it were going to be a dry Christmas, it was a most jolly ten days beforehand, with the shopping and running and talking, in which last every one had unrestricted part, with the measuring and planning and cutting, with new

clothes bought, old clothes made over, with something for each individual to do in the matter of the little Stuarts. And Mamma Meyer had so much help that, after all, she found time to make a new dressing-gown from the pattern of the old one and part of her old velvet shawl, for they all felt the indulgent father must have that, at any rate. And when the proper Christmas snow-storm arrived and cleared away, and the Risleys sent for them one and all to come across the street for a merrymaking on Christmas night itself, and the green was up, and the stars came out frostily, and the church bells began to ring, and every one was running every way, even Rafe singing, "There was racing and chasing on Cannobie Lee," they all said, upon comparing notes, that they felt as if this was going to be the first Christmas they had ever had. And at last, John and Rosy having been chosen to go — Hester having refused because she thought it might trouble the Stuarts to see so many — the great business of the hour was despatched with their father and Miss Persis in the sleigh. And when they came back, and told of the sick

father's bursting out crying, and of the mother's wheeling her new chair across the room, and throwing her arms over him as he lay there helpless, and the children's astonished silence at first, and then their yells of delight, and the embraces they gave Rosy and John, who backed away from them red and grinning, and how glad they felt driving home in the light of a big yellow moon that came rolling up purposely to light the way,—when they heard it all, Marcia and Hester just threw their arms about each other and cried too.

And when little Tot woke up later that evening, and found something lying in the bed with her—something soft and cool and sweet-smelling—and rubbed her eyes, and scrambled out to turn up the night-lamp, and saw a wonderful wax doll, all smiles and rosiness, enough to warm any little mother-heart alive, she made a noise that called all the family about her. “I don't want to be left out,” she was roaring, as she stood in her little long night-dress at the head of the stairs. “I'm plenty big enough. I yove my old dolly best. I yant the Stuart baby

to have it." And nothing pacified her till Michael put on his coat, and took the lovely wax lady in her silken dress, and went and tied it on the door-handle of the little house in the woods. And Hester and Marcia, watching with Rafe for him to come back in the light of the great Christmas moon across the snow, declared to each other that as long as they lived they never expected to be so useful again, or so happy as they were that Christmas Eve!

JULE'S GARDEN.

JULE'S GARDEN.

ALL the girls at St. Mark's had their little plots of garden, if they chose, and the Trustees were given a vase of flowers from the best one every year; and in return the Trustees gave the successful young gardener rare shrubs and seeds and potted plants. Once Hester Stanley was the successful one; for her father had sent her the bulbs of some wonderful orchids from the South Sea Islands. She shared them with Marcia, who let them die; and then she shared again her half with Jule, who was extravagantly fond of flowers; and every year after that the vase of flowers was picked from Jule Spencer's garden. For Jule knew a good deal about flowers and their care before the minister urged her father to send her to St. Mark's, —although the minister did not call it St.

Mark's, but the Girls' School at Waterways. And indeed it was Jule's garden at home that indirectly sent her to Waterways.

She had been standing once on the river-bank beside Jack, who was fishing, or thought he was, when she suddenly exclaimed, —

“Oh, there he is! Look, — across the river! He's set down his camera. Oh, he's going to take the barn! It's the minister! Oh, and with so many places, to take that, the very ugliest spot on the whole point!” And she began to twist her curls, — always a sign of distress with little Jule, the boys said.

“It's the gobbler he's taking,” said Jack.

“I don't care. It brings in the barn, too, and the hen-yard —”

“The gobbler knows he's taking him,” said Jack.

“Oh, yes, he's a beauty, standing there on the bulkhead for the hens to admire him. But all the same —”

“All the same, little Jule, you feel the disgrace of having that hen-yard handed down to posterity,” said Mr. Jack, pulling in his line with

nothing on it. There never was anything on it; but that made no difference in Jack's liking to lie along the rock and drop his line in and pull it out again.

"Oh, Jack," said Jule, "you might make that place decent! You might drive out those hens and fix their run somewhere else —"

"I might go up in a balloon," said Jack, jerking his sinker. "There, you run along, puss, and let the poor hens alone. Take life easy till school begins." And he leaned along the rock as if he really would be disappointed if a fish bit. The spring sun shone pleasantly, the birds darted across the blue sky, the wind was sweet with the smell of new furrows and leafy things; softly the sound of a hurdy-gurdy came from the distance, and Jack was too comfortable to bother himself about hens and hen-yards. So little Jule went her way, feeling that if it were any one but Jack she could be cross.

She had so often thought it was such a pity that spot should be given up to hens! And she had a superlative dislike of hens; she felt there must be an untouchable roughness about their

feathers, the thought of which set her teeth on edge; and, moreover, she was mortally afraid of them. An old mother-hen had once flown in her face when she was only picking up a chicken, and had finished for her the whole hen-family. How lovely that bank would be with terraces and rock-work and geraniums and beds of poppies! She had spoken to Tom about it, but he had pooh-poohed; and her mother said it would be too much trouble; and her father said the men were busy, and why didn't she make her own gardens? One day, indeed, a year ago, she had opened the gate in the lath-fence, and had flirted her handkerchief and shooed, her heart beating furiously, and had reached in with her trowel, digging a hole into which she had dropped a root of violets, pressed it down, poured some water over it, shooing all the time, and had shut the gate and run. The hens ran, too, and in ten minutes there wasn't a shred of that violet left.

However, there were more serious things in life than gardens. There was the bureau-cloth she was embroidering for her mother, the socks

she was knitting, and her lessons to be learned. There was the loaf of bread to be taken to Mrs. Nourse's, where poor Danny Nourse, who had lost his left hand, was bemoaning the hard fate that had taken it off and would oblige him to wear a hook, when so little money would buy an artificial hand for him who must earn his own living by the work of his hands. "Father has n't any money or he would give it to Danny. And there is n't any way in which I can earn a nickel. Oh," sighed Jule, "it is dreadful to be so useless."

Poor Danny really needed his hand, for his head was of little use to him. Jule, in a time of enthusiasm, had offered to teach him to read, and had accomplished her work only after long devotion.

"B-a-g," Danny would spell.

"Well," Jule would say, "what is it?"

"B-a-g," Danny would reiterate.

"Well, what does that spell? Don't you know, Danny? Why, what do you carry things in?"

"Oh! Pocket!" cried Danny, quite delighted with himself.

A year of effort on Jule's part, and, indeed, on Danny's too, and the accident to Danny's hand

put an end to lessons. It had been a distressing time to Jule, too, when the operation took place. She had gone down with some broth her mother sent, and found the doctor just ready to remove the mutilated hand, but the one who was to give the ether not arrived, and Mrs. Nourse in the other room and quite incapable.

"I'll not be afther waitin' for the likes o' him, docthor dear," said Danny. "Go ahead wid ye!"

"You don't know anything about it, my lad," said the doctor.

"I do, thin. I'll not holler," turning his fevered eyes to the kitchen door, "for the fear o' troublin' *her*. I'd not be havin' her hear me."

"No, no, my boy."

"I'd be glad it wor over," pleaded Danny. "I could bear the hurt for the little time. Oh, my poor hand that was a help to me, it's losin' ye I am! There's the little Miss Jule, the craythur! If she'll just sit by an' look at me, with the swate smile of her, an' maybe hould the other hand, I'll not stir a scrap, docthor dear. I'd be ashamed, ye know. An' it's herself wud put the comfort intil me. Oh, Miss July darlint, — forby

the pain I'd be spakin' more respectful like, — it's meself is as glad to see ye as the doves of Cashel. If ye'll hold by me hond, I won't lave ye know it's hurtin' me at all, it is!" And Jule felt her heart sink and shake; but she sat down and took his well hand in both of hers, and then the other doctor bustled in, and Jule wanted to shut her eyes, but didn't, because she knew that Danny wished her to smile at him. "Begorra!" said Danny, as the doctor adjusted the towel round the ether sponge and came to place it over his mouth. "It's me roight hond'll be left till me now!" She felt as if she were assisting at Danny's execution. But the doctor's kind words to him reassured her, and she was able to look at the brave boy, and smile, and now and then press the hand she held till at length he slept. And at that she turned her head away and closed her own eyes, and began to say all the prayers she knew. Then, as she felt that the doctors were not giving Danny a particle of pain, the once hateful smell of the ether reminded her of heaps of oranges, and afterwards, when she sometimes saw brides, and smelled their garlands of orange-

flowers, instead of festivity and joy only, it made her think of the gracious strength of ether, that brought almost the greatest blessing of God to man, — surcease from pain.

So, it may be seen, Jule felt an interest in Danny's welfare, and did all in her power for him, and sighed to think, do what she would, she could not raise money for an artificial hand that might help him to a livelihood.

"Well," thought Jule, as she left Jack and his fishing, that spring morning, "if I can't get any one to see to that place, I can't." But she paused when she reached the fence of the hen-yard, and looked through wistfully. There was not a hen in the place! They had all gone up their queer slatted walk into the upper yard, where Tom was scattering corn. What an inspiration came to Jule that minute, what courage! Her heart beat in her throat; but she opened the little lath gate, stepped over the sill, ran like the wind across the hen-yard and up the rocks, and drew a loose board over the little door made for the hens to go down into their run.

"Now you're there, you stay there," she said,

for the large upper run was really quite enough for them. A young rooster crowed insultingly at that, and another took up the tale, and Jule scampered as if a whole flight of cockerels were after her.

But presently, summoning up courage, she took a survey of the premises, — a dingle between two bluffs sloping from the river to the barn at a height above; at the base of the barn a stone pig-pen, whose wall was six feet high. The barnyard heap was no longer thrown down there, but a bulkhead had once been built below to keep the compost from washing into the river. "Woodbine — and there's plenty in the woods — could grow over the back of that barn," thought Jule, "and the Boston ivy, if I could get some, would cover the pig-pen like a mat. Oh, wouldn't it be lovely!" And then she looked in despair at the earth the hens had scratched bare, the heaps of stones, the impossible confusion of boards and cans and bottles. "I'll try," she exclaimed presently.

"Oh, Danny, would you mind coming out to the Falls woods?" she asked, a little later.

"Dade, thin, I wud," said Danny, "an' be glad in me sowl, so I wud." And they came home in an hour with baskets of wild woodbine roots and sweet-briers; and Danny's one hand and Jule's two disposed them at the barn corners, and by the big bowlders at the dingle-side.

"Now," said Jule, having watered them thoroughly, "the ladies in the brick house down town may give us some slips of their Boston ivy, and they 'll make a beautiful green wall of the pigpen — in time, you know, Danny."

Then Jule went in and knit at her sock. "Mother dear," said she, after knitting several rounds, "can't I have the bulbs the dahlias in the front yard made last year?"

"The bulbs?" said her mother, pinching her pastry. "What for?"

"Oh, I know!" said Jule.

"Mis' Nourse won't care about a garden; but you can have 'em, I guess."

And the next day the Boston ivy and the dahlia-bulbs were in place, and Jule and Danny had fastened the board against the hens, and had nailed pickets at the top of the fence there, two

of the Virginia-creepers being set to climb over the fence eventually and hide it altogether.

"Oh," cried Jule, "I am going to make the wilderness blossom like a rose!" And then the two little people began to toil over the road from the ploughed fields with baskets of earth that they tumbled into the crannies and along the slope. And they laboriously brought up stones from the shore day after day, and slowly made a rude wall for a terrace below the pig-pen, filling the space with earth.

"They do be sayin'," remarked Danny, "that the min out there to Washington, or wheriver, has the givin' o' flower-sades be the peck, good loock till 'em, an' ye can have thim for the askin'. Sorra a bit uv me knows."

That night Jule found who was her member of Congress, and the reply to her modest request came, to the wonderment of the family, as a package addressed to Miss Julia Spencer, and containing, she fancied, the seeds of half the flowers that blow. "Oh, here are larkspurs!" she cried. "You know how tall and blue they are. And stocks, and phlox, and feverfew, and

marigolds, and candytuft, oh, and nasturtiums! Sweet alyssum, too, and balsam, and salvia, and cosmos, and morning-glories, oh, and hollyhocks! How perfectly delightful!"

"That's what your country does for you," said Jack.

"It's a dear country!" cried Jule. And the frost being gone, it took only a day to sow the terrace-bed in plots. Then they picked up and raked and spaded in comfort on the incline towards the bulkhead. "The great beds of poppies there will be so splendid from the river!" cried Jule.

"The tides'll be drowndin' thim out intirely, so they will, Miss Jule," said Danny.

"But it won't hurt them."

"They'll be afther flowerin' in the islands of the dape say."

"I'll risk it," said Jule. "I'll drop the seeds."

"An' the next high tide'll be doin' the rest," said Danny; and it did. There was not a poppy-seed left.

Then they sowed nasturtiums by the fence where she used to have the horrible vision of the

hens. "You hold the string for their climbing, Danny, till I tie it. I'll put in the stick. Now another. I tell you, it tires your back! But when it's a gold and scarlet curtain here, won't it be glorious? Oh! can't you see it, splendid with dew, and the sun shining on it?"

After this there were morning-glories sowed on the other upper side, till the woodbine should be grown next year. And what joy it was to watch those woodbines for their first pout! Jule gave them water morning and night. "Oh, they're alive!" she shouted; and she sat down before the first buds and warbled little songs of joy.

Jule had some geraniums of her own in the kitchen. She had early cut off slips; and now she set them in the crannies of that ugly eastern corner. And then school began. But the moment school was out, and she had done all her mother wished, she was down in her retreat, wondering if this were a sprouting seed or that were a weed, watering and pottering and learning the ways of nature out of nature's book.

The loss of the poppies was sad. There had to

be another wall to hold a terrace beyond any rise of the tide. With the only silver piece she had, she hired old Jerry to dig a trench; and when he saw her lugging up the stones, he worked over-time every day to help her. And although it took them the rest of the summer, they laid that wall, and plastered it from a half barrel of cement they found in the cellar; but it was not till the fall ploughing that they could fill it with earth. And if Jule knit Jerry all the socks he wore that winter, it was not in the way of payment, but because she loved to do it.

But it had been fatiguing to fetch the water from the river in the evenings after the hot days, and nobody in the house took much interest. Her father had consented to the banishment of the hens, but her mother said it was a waste of time; and it seemed as if every one had something for her to do when her flowers needed her, for the leakage from barn and pig-pen made the soil so rich that the weeds grew faster than the flowers.

Danny was picking potato-bugs in the field when Jule was taken with a cold; and when she was about again and went down, the garden was

a wilderness of white-weed and wild carrot. "I must have some flowering bushes that the weeds can't hurt," said Jule, as she took up her geraniums, by and by, and gathered her seeds, still rejoicing in her zinnias and cosmos. She had quantities of seeds; the family could not imagine what she was doing when they saw her putting them into papers, but supposed it was all in the way of her foolishness about the garden. They did not know that the store-keeper had got her some bulbs, which she had put in the ground in September for early growth, and was going to take his pay in flower-seeds, or they might have objected to such independent proceedings on her part.

But when the next spring opened, the snow was not gone before the little gardener was down in her preserve, pulling off old stalks and preparing for the new campaign. Then Danny and she went off to a pasture where once a house had stood with damask-roses in its yard; and they came back with lilac-rods that went into the ground up the slope behind the geraniums, and with no end of the roses. And no young prin-

cess ever took more enjoyment in the glint of her rubies than Jule did when those rose-stems strung themselves with tiny red leaf-buds.

Jule had now saved another dollar, and had gone down to a florist's. "I want so many things," she sighed. "And I have only a dollar. Do you suppose I could get a couple of trumpet-vines, and a honeysuckle, and a Seven Sisters rose, and a hydrangea, and a scarlet japonica, and a flowering almond, and a spice-plant —"

"For a dollar?" asked the florist, smiling. "Well, I don't know. I suppose you would n't mind if I throw in a Jacque-rose and a chrysanthemum?"

"Oh," cried Jule, with sparkling eyes, "do you really mean so?" And the treasures she bore off were almost more than she could carry.

There were disappointments about the little garden this year; the flies hurt this, and the slugs that, and the drought and the rain the others, and the watering was more than she could do without Danny, and Danny used to wail that he couldn't be in two places "to onst, so he could n't." Still, there were moments of



satisfaction when the pleasure-boats went up the river, or when she saw the minister shooting by in his boat and looking at her roses.

But the third summer Jule's undertaking was a success. "Wife," said her father, "our Jule's got quite a garden down at the old hen-run. I'll rig a spout from the spring in the barn, so she won't have to be dragging water."

"Sis," said Tom, "I'm going to do a day's work in your garden. What shall it be?"

"Jule," called Jack, "I've got a syringa-bush from the Squire's for your garden." So true it is that nothing succeeds like success.

But these were scattered offerings. Usually Jule, and Danny, when he could, plodded on alone, and had their reward of pure joy in beauty.

It was a day in the depth of summer that Jule went shopping down town with her mother. Mrs. Spencer was hard to please; and while this and that were handed down, Jule amused herself with the advertisements posted on the shed; "Take Pill's Powders," half covered by a circus picture, on which again were pasted smaller

notices of the "Sale of a Farm," the loss of a White Cat with a black tip to its tail, the Village Improvement Society's reward of fifty dollars, the finding of a Sum of Money, an Auctioneer's Sale. Jule was still spelling them out when her mother in some excitement left the shop-keeper, who had been talking to her in an animated way. "I want you to run right home, Jule," she said, "and go down to your garden — I'm glad you put on your white print — I suppose your hair's all a snarl," lifting the hat to smooth the yellow curls. "Make haste — some one's coming there."

"But I'd rather wait for you," said Jule.

"Never mind me. I'll be there pretty soon." And according to her custom Jule wonderingly did as she was told. "That old hen-run!" she heard her mother murmuring.

Jule reached the garden and was down on the bulkhead just in time to see a flock of sails swelling up the stream, and circling a little way above like swans, while a fleet of row-boats followed, trimmed out with flags. There were girls singing in the boats, and some one in the

last boat was blowing a cornet. It seemed to Jule as lovely as a crowd of water-nymphs could be. Looking back to see if her mother was coming, she saw her father and Jack and Tom hurrying down the bank where Jack used to drop his line; and while she was looking back, a boat rowed up, the rowers grasping the bulkhead, while some one stepped out — the minister!

The minister turned directly and addressed the people in the boats, who stopped their music at once. "My friends," Jule heard him saying, "you have all seen the photograph I chanced to take of this place as it was three years ago. You all see it now — the building a tower of verdure, the walls turned to banks of living green, the fences transformed to curtains of blossoming splendor. Where all was shapeless confusion, here are terraces that in spring blushed red with roses, and where now the lilies stand in ranks of white and gold. The spot that was a waste haunted by the owl and the dragon — that is, by the gobbler and the hen — is turned to a blaze of glory. So, in accordance with your decree, I now deliver the reward of fifty dollars

for the greatest improvement within our borders to Miss Julia Spencer!" And then, before he stepped into his boat, and the oars dipped, and the sails of the others ran up, and the whole shining flotilla moved away, the minister had handed to the astonished child, who stood winding her curls about her fingers, a purse through whose meshes sparkled five golden eagles. And then a shout went up from all the boats, and the cornet began to play, and the girls sang, "Come into the garden, Maud," till the music was nothing but an enchanting echo in the distance; and Jule, in her bewildered amazement, came near dropping the purse into the river.

"Well, that's what I call worth while," cried Jack, when Jule had left off crying her tears of surprise. "What you going to do with it, Sis?"

And then Jule drew herself up with pride and gladness. "I am going to get Danny his artificial hand."

"And it will be the best thing that ever grew in a garden!" cried her father.

APRIL SHOWERS.

APRIL SHOWERS.

POOR Miss Risley ! She did not, the least in the world, know what to do with Charlotte. "If I can't govern a child without whipping her," she used to say, "I won't try to govern her at all." But the mischief was that she did try to govern Charlotte, and Charlotte was ungovernable.

There was not a demurer puss alive than this little girl when she walked to church beside her aunt on a Sunday, with her bright curls tied away in a blue ribbon that returned the blue of her eyes, although her face, if you looked closely, was all ready to break out in smiles.

You never would think it was her voice that presently would be piping up the tune of some popular ballad to the sacred words the choir sung — simply to see how they would go.

You never would think it was she who, after a critical examination of Miss Marvin's new wrap during the sermon, wrote in large script on a blank leaf of the hymnal the awful words "Bargain Counter," and watched her chance to pin it — no, I cannot tell it. Only Charlotte had to beg Miss Marvin's pardon in dust and ashes, and her aunt's pardon, and the minister's, and say penitential psalms, and go without sugar, and save her pennies, too, till she had enough to buy a new hymnal.

It was in Miss Risley's system of rewards and punishments that Charlotte was sent to spend the next Sunday and meditate alone in the garret; and that when Miss Risley came home from church she had the pleasure of seeing a large board, which Charlotte could never have suspended under the window if John Meyer had not come over to help her, bearing in black paint and huge letters the words "Children Not Wantid Hear," the truth of which legend made its offence all the greater.

But Charlotte could not seem to help it; mischief was her natural element. She did not

mean to be naughty; she wished to be good. She loved her aunt, for that was all she had of her own to love. She shed showers of tears while the wickedness of her capers was explained to her. She would kiss Miss Risley, with repeated hugs, and hide her mop of yellow curls in her neck, and promise everything — and perform nothing, the joys of disobedience, of idling, of startling, being greater than the love.

And there were the Meyers across the street; and Miss Risley used to say the Meyer children were enough to demoralize a whole neighborhood — the poor dears.

She did n't say "the poor dears."

She tried to forbid them the house except on state occasions, when they were invited to a solemn banquet of hot biscuit and jam, to which they went eagerly every time, forgetting the misery of the last time, and from which they poured home whooping with the escape of vitality that they could not carry at the high pressure of good behavior another minute.

The Meyer children, of course, were the greatest comfort to Charlotte. She used to

admire Rafe from an awful distance, he was so fine and lordly, and always did what was right, and looked like St. John and all the prophets, as Marcia said, having the prophets and apostles confused in her mind. But as for John Meyer, and Marcia, too, when she was at home on her vacations, Charlotte always found them a very present help in time of naughtiness, in which they were hand in glove, and usually made more noise about it than the incarnation of the Spirit of Mischief in the Rheingold does.

Mr. Meyer had been talking of moving south for a long time. "Oh, why does n't he go?" moaned Miss Risley, although she knew she should miss the older ones of the family sadly. And then her heart smote her for Charlotte's loneliness if he did; and yet, she said, why should she suffer everything, and have her head splitting with the racket, and her nerves kept a-twitter with fear of damage to her portraits and her precious polished old furniture and heirlooms, in order to have Charlotte amused?

"I will be good! Oh, auntie, I will be good!" Charlotte would exclaim, her heart full of peni-

tence and her eyes fountains of tears. And then there came Marcia with the sun shining in her red hair, going birdnesting with John, and all the little Meyers tearing after them, and what could Charlotte do but follow, and come home dishevelled and drenched and torn, having broken up the fun half-way by a spasm of repentance?

"It is more than I can do to keep you in clothes," cried her aunt. "Every gown you have is torn, and this is sopping!" And she straightway rummaged from one of the old chests in the garret a little short gown and cap and petticoats of a remote ancestress, and clad Charlotte in them for the mortification of the flesh, while she and Peggy darned and patched the torn gingham of to-day.

But poor Miss Risley failed of her purpose. Charlotte was immensely delighted with herself in her antique dress; and she watched and called across the road, and exhibited herself to her friends. "Don't I look just like great-great-grandma?" she cried, framed by the casement. And it was the picture she made in the window that gave John the idea.

Her aunt had sent her over to ask the Meyer children to tea. They were going to have hot muffins and preserved plums and chocolate, which she announced to the invited guests at once. It was in the Easter vacation, and Marcia was at home, and stooping over a little fire on the schoolroom hearth, scrambling eggs that she had rifled from one of the haymows.

"And I got caught in the shower and wet through for my pains," said Marcia. "John, you let those eggs alone! I'm going to make a nogg for mamma with those. Oh, it's a great deal nicer at St. Mark's than here. There goes the baby!" Tot was the Meyer baby then. "I wish I was back at school and you were with me, Charlotte."

"I don't know," said Charlotte.

"I do," said Marcia.

"It's pretty good fun here — when auntie lets me come over. And I run away when she does n't, you know," said Charlotte, with frankness.

"It's better fun at school with the pillow-fights in the dormitory, — when it is n't Miss Brown's week, — and roasting chestnuts on hair-

pins in the lamp, and telling ghost stories in the dark. And there's Mr. Marquand's school across the bay, and Joe and the boys — Oh, I wish you knew Bella — she's just perfectly lovely! As for Miss Brown — well, Miss Marks is our angel of light, anyway, and I suppose she'll make an angel of me sometime."

"She has a lot to do, then," said Rafe. Rafe before that accident was one boy, and Rafe afterward was another. "You can't make bricks without straw."

"I've heard of a man of straw and a rope of straw, but I never heard of a straw angel!"

"We should, if you were one."

"Dear me, how much you know about angels!"

"I don't know why I do in this family," said Rafe. "It is n't a little heaven below."

"Let's make it one!" cried Marcia. "Children, attention! Charlotte, you take one of the chair-legs and I'll take the other —"

"I dare you!" said Rafe.

"Helen, you take a rung, and John the other. Bert, you're too little to be much good, but remember you're a man! You'll do for the

front on one side, and Rosy and Agnes the other. You dare us now? Quick! All together!" And before Rafe, who in his dignity had scorned to move, could resist the attack, the chair was lifted like a palanquin.

"Put me down! Put me down!" cried Rafe.

"Will you be good?" said Marcia. "Will you go on lording it over us? Will you call me a straw angel? Will you divide those gum imperials?"

"You put me down!" cried Rafe. And as the little ones were weakening, the chair was lowered. And then the moment the feet were on the floor, some one, were it Marcia, or Charlotte, or John, or Helen, no one knew which, gave a push, a jerk, and the chair went one way and Rafe another, and Rafe did not get up again, but lay a white heap on the floor.

As quick as saying, Charlotte whipped through the door, across the green and the road, to her own yard, and then up to the garret, hiding herself under the rafters. "Oh, I've killed him! I've killed him!" she was crying. "What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?"

But while she was bewailing herself Marcia's voice came up under the window, and she ran to look out, her face streaming with tears, but at Marcia's words breaking into sunshine and smiles.

"It's all right!" said Marcia. "He came round all right. It isn't anything. He says it isn't. It hit him in the back. We're awfully rough. But we'll all be over to tea —"

"Oh! I am so glad!" cried Charlotte. "I'm so glad! Come up here now, Marcia. Auntie's gone out, and we can rummage. Here's lots of things!"

And all her grief forgotten, they were pulling brocade gowns and lace capes and velvet coats, faded to a tarnished splendor, from their chests and trying them on and parading the dusky garret like old ghosts come again, when John ran up and found them.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Charlotte. "I'll go over in the high pasture before tea and get some frogs' eggs for Rafe's aquarium. You come, too, John."

"I can't," said John. "They sent me for the doctor."

"Then you go right along!" said Marcia.

"Well, I can go alone," said Charlotte. "And perhaps I can scoop up a newt — he'll like the little old man in the water."

"He's got one," said Marcia.

"Then I'll get him a sod of violets for his garden."

"But your aunt said you mustn't cross the pasture again —"

"I don't care. Besides, she won't mind as long as it's for Rafe."

"She'd call it in the interest of science."

"Oh, Marcia! How much you know! Do you suppose I ever could know as much if I went to school at St. Mark's?"

"Oh, you might," said Marcia, with a queer look, "if you worked as hard as I do."

"I'm so tired of saying my lessons to auntie! Those pillow-fights must be — Oh, and do you really —"

"Oh, we really do!" said Marcia. "And John is going to Mr. Marquand's in a year or two —"

"I don't suppose auntie 'll ever let me —"

"We'll make her let you!" cried John.

"John, if you were sent for the doctor, it's because the doctor's wanted," exclaimed Marcia. "I shall have to go and see!" And then they all scampered downstairs and off in their different directions.

It had been a bright April day with a south wind, and many a flashing bluebird's wing. The saxifrage was shivering in the cranny of every rock, and the grass was as green as velvet, and here and there a clump of violets had bloomed; the sky was full of little clouds blushing toward sunset, and the birds were darting, and the frogs were piping, and Charlotte danced along feeling all April in her veins.

There was a pool where the cattle drank and the swallows and blue dragon-flies dipped and circled in the later summer-time, and Charlotte, going her gay way to the further brook, forgot it till she saw it, and then she stopped so short that she stumbled, and, trying to recover herself, fell head over heels into its stagnant, shallow water.

And when she had scrambled out of the mire she found something ailed her ankle, — it was broken, she thought, or sprained, or strained; she could not say which, and it hurt dreadfully, and she could not walk, and she did not see how she was ever going to get home. "Oh!" she groaned, "why did I ever come? Why did I help pull that chair out? I wish there never had been a chair in the world! Oh!"

All unconscious of Charlotte's absence, the guests invited to the festival of muffins and plum preserves had been received by Miss Risley herself, they imagining Charlotte was in bed for misdemeanor, she wondering where on earth Charlotte was, but understanding they were to be taken care of while the doctor was attending to Rafe, whose back was hurt more seriously than had been supposed. The thought of Rafe interfered with their enjoyment of the delicious sugary tartness of their feast not a little, until Miss Risley, who had kept going to window and door, finally sent them home, and started out with the servants to find her delinquent.

"I must have done something terrible,"

groaned poor Miss Risley, "that I should be afflicted with this child! I never know what it is to have one moment's peace!"

Meanwhile Charlotte was lying out in the pasture, as wet as you please, and very angry and discouraged; for she had crept only a little way before the pain in her ankle made everything seem so black that she had to pause and stay where she was. She hallooed her best, but no one passed that way, and no one heard her.

She saw the color in the sunset sky, like a vast crimson flower with a golden heart, fade away till a great planet hung over a sea of amber air, and then the twilight drew a veil across the planet, and pale, sweet stars flickered out in a multitude, and it darkened into deep night, so deep and so far that it suddenly seemed to Charlotte, as she stopped complaining long enough to look up, that she almost saw into heaven. A blue star, like an immense jewel, was swinging up out of the northeast, and a meteor slipped along and left a trail of light, and the sense of her naughtiness gave these great things a very depressing effect.

It began to be quite cold; she was already chill with her wetting. It looked to her as if she were going to be left here all night. And maybe she would die. She wondered why no one missed her; why her aunt, or the Meyers, or even the minister, was not looking for her; if they did n't care enough about her to notice she was gone.

Then she remembered that they were all having the hot buttered muffins and plum preserves. And very likely Marcia was telling that story of the African lion and the polar bear, and it was enough to make you die of laughing. As she thought of the muffins, she felt extraordinarily hungry; as she thought of the story, she cried a little. Then she worried along on her elbows, and reached the stump where the cows, when there were cows there, rubbed themselves, and she pulled herself up, and stood on one leg, and gingerly put her other foot on the ground, and — walked off as well as she ever did in her life.

She didn't know what to make of it — it looked like a miracle — but she had an inner consciousness that miracles were not likely to be

wrought for her. At any rate, she had no time to think of it, out here all alone in the dark. She gave a scream and ran like a deer, and never stopped to wonder what had become of her lame ankle.

"Oh, children," said Marcia, as they were trooping home, "how good you were! It was beautiful of you to behave so. Now, Miss Risley won't think it is we that are ruining Charlotte. I will tell you this very moment the story of the African lion and the polar bear.

"‘I may be draggled,’ said the polar bear, ‘but I am naturally as white as the driven snow about me.’

"‘And I,’ said the African lion, ‘am as yellow as the sand of my deserts when the sun shines on them.’

"‘My very first food,’ said the polar bear, ‘was ice-cream —’ Goodness! This is Charlotte’s story; she always rolls over at the funny part. Where do you suppose she can be gone?"

And just then Charlotte appeared among them, and they all had to go back and intercede for her

with her aunt, who paid no attention to a word they said, but shut the door in their faces, and plunged Charlotte into a hot bath, and rubbed her till she tingled, crying herself with perplexity and anxiety, and saying she did n't know what was to become of Charlotte, till Charlotte cried with her.

"I think you must give me a whipping to-morrow," said Charlotte, solemnly. "If it will make me better. But you know I only disobeyed — I was n't being wicked — I was getting something for a sick person — Rafe is a little sick — "

"A little sick!" cried her aunt. "It is ten to one he will never be any better. You have broken his back among you!"

And then Charlotte howled. "Oh, it won't do any good to whip me!" she sobbed. "You will have to send me to prison! I ought to go to the House of Correction!"

"I will make this the house of correction!" said Miss Risley.

"Why don't you send me to school?" asked Charlotte, stopping her sobs suddenly. "Marcia is going back day after to-morrow. Oh, I

want to go where I sha'n't see Rafe and think of it every day!"

"Not till I can't govern you myself," said Miss Risley.

In the middle of the night a little barefooted white figure beside her bed waked Miss Risley. "Oh, do you really think Rafe is going to die?" she whispered.

"No, I don't!" snapped Miss Risley. "You go right back to bed. Perhaps he'll be a hunchback, unless the doctor has some way to prevent it. You see what comes —"

But Charlotte had rushed back in a tempest of cries and sobs, and from time to time in the night Miss Risley heard her, till she could bear it no longer, and she got up and took her into her own bed, and left her there asleep at last, and darkened the room and stole away at sunrise.

But early in the forenoon Charlotte was over at the Meyers', where the frightened children were now very quiet and awestruck, and was up in Rafe's room.

"I'm going to have a whipping when I go back," she said. "But I wanted to run over first

and tell you that if it was I that hurt you, I will spend all my life waiting on you !”

“Charlotte, there is n’t any straw in your sort of angel, whatever Marcia’s is !” whispered Rafe. Presently, between little gasps, he added, “And — I guess — it is n’t as bad — as you think. I shall be — abed — a good while, the doctor says — and I always did like to lie abed.”

But Charlotte knew he was in pain, and she went downstairs with her face all blubbered with tears again, and threw herself into Marcia’s arms with inconsolable outcry. “I don’t know how I can bear it,” she sobbed.

“That child will have to be sent away to school,” said Mr. Meyer, “and have her mind diverted, or she’ll be sick.” And he went on pacing up and down.

“Miss Risley thinks that would be shirking her duty,” said Marcia, quite worn out herself with all the sorrow and excitement. “As if Miss Marks couldn’t do it twice as well ! Besides, Charlotte, you know perfectly it was I and not you who did it.”

“Oh, no, I don’t know. And it does n’t make

it any better. It's done. And auntie's going to have Dr. Grump and the minister to tea to-night, to see what ought to be done with me. And I wish it was my back! And I don't care what they do!"

But John had pricked up his ears at her words. And it was in consequence that, an hour or two afterwards, he might have been seen sitting on the step of Miss Risley's side piazza with Charlotte, every now and then going into the dining-room, apparently on a tour of observation.

"I say — it's just stretched on a frame and held by nails," said he. "It's easy enough to pull 'em out, and we'll lift it down, it's light, and put it in the passage; no one comes out here yet. It's luck — being across that recess. There's the red satin quilt we can hang over the corner, you know. And there's the very things they wear, upstairs in the garret now. And we'll hear every word the doctor and the minister say —"

"We'll do it!" said Charlotte. "It'll be better fun than tableaux!" brightening as if

the sun had come out. And they went in and stood like entranced creatures before the great life-sized copy of Charlotte's great-great-grandmother and her brother, painted when they were children, the boy carrying a riding-whip and the girl holding an orange.

The tea-table was arrayed that afternoon in Miss Risley's best damask and old blue, and Peggy came in to light the candles in the side candlesticks on the table, the roof of the piazza making the room shadowy. She felt as if there were something wrong about the room; she couldn't tell what it was; and just then the knocker fell, and Miss Risley was receiving the guests in her high and mightiest state, and presently, after brief blessing, the ceremonies were opened with the grape-fruit half filled with sugar and sherry, the aroma having made two unbidden little mouths water for some time and still making them water.

"I have asked you here and left word when Charlotte comes in—for she and John Meyer are off on some raid—that she shall go to bed supperless—"

"Oh!" came a groan, as if from a mouse in the wainscot.

"So that I might consult you about her," said Miss Risley. "I am sure," pride at the fore again, "there is no real harm in the child. But she overflows with spirits, and—and—and I can't govern her. She is—oh, she is her father all over. And you knew dear Charles—" and here Miss Risley fumbled for her handkerchief.

"It's tiring my hand dreadfully to hold this orange up so," the child in the picture was murmuring with lips that did not dare to move. "And I want to sneeze. I've caught cold. And I can't look at nothing one moment longer."

"You keep still or I'll make you!" growled another whisper.

What made Miss Risley start so as she wiped her eyes, wandering from the bright table to the shadowy walls? Were her troubles getting too much for her and her mind failing? Had that dim portrait of her great-grandmother when a child winked at her?

"My dear Miss Risley," the minister was saying, "Charlotte is a dear child." It was all the

little boy in the picture could do not to kick the little girl in the picture. "But she needs brothers and sisters —"

"As if I had n't you and the rest!" the whisper came again.

"She needs a care that I don't know how to give her!" cried Miss Risley.

"Send her to school," mumbled Dr. Grump, his mouth full of the broiled oysters. "Excellent school — Meyer's oldest girl — Waterways — dear — but cheap at any price — save your life and your reason — make a woman of her —"

"*Kerchew!*" came a sneeze from the great-grandmother in the picture, and the next instant two little wretches were racing out of the room and the picture frame was empty!

"Oh, my Copley!" shrieked Miss Risley. "Charlotte! Charlotte, do you hear me? Come here, miss, this very minute!"

And — well, it was a very bad quarter of an hour that followed. But that was when it was arranged that Charlotte should go to school with Marcia on Saturday morning.

RAFE.

RAFE.

WHEN Rafe at last fell asleep, after the doctors were through with him and had given him a composing draught, he had a singular dream. He had always the hearing of Fine Ears, and he had heard the doctors in the next room saying the injury to his back was such that it was doubtful if he ever walked again. For a moment a wave of anger had swept over him, a fierce surge of rage. Against whom? against what? He knew not. His heart sank with the uselessness of his anger. It was idle to feel any indignation with the children who had pulled the chair out and let him fall — Marcia and Charlotte and John and Helen and the rest; he was one of them and as much in the sport as they had been. But at any rate there were the doctors; their shoulders were

broad enough to bear his wrath. Much they knew! Walk again? Of course he should walk again! He would walk again just to defy them! He heard the children crying in the room above; he looked up and saw his mother's eyes brimming like two violets full of dew; something made his heart stand still for half a beat. Was it really so serious, after all? He would not give up till his father gave up. Was that his father? He saw him in the mantel mirror, face down on the lounge in the other room, whose door had sprung ajar; he heard him — yes, he heard him groan. It was a dreadful sound; he felt himself trembling; his blood seemed to spin in a hot torrent. He would let them see whether he would walk or not! And then the beads started out on his forehead, on his breast — all over him; he had called on every power he had and he had not moved a line. And with that, the fright, the horror, the effort, the composing draught all worked together, and he was sinking, sinking, sinking, and slowly drowned in sleep.

As he slept, and in his dream, the day was

dying and he was far from home; he could see the last rays of the sun sparkling in the windows, of the house up there—or was it the pillared porch of some building in the skies? Whatever it was, between him and its shining stairs stretched a weary space, long wastes of furze, pitfalls of bog, fields of stubble—a rough and rocky country where the dark gathered. A storm was coming up—he could not tell if it were the wind or some wild beast that howled. And there beyond, in the calm, upper light of the hillside, lay the dear home, where the sun, bursting from the low cloud, glittered on the panes. How could he ever reach it? How was he to cross that interminable country, with its flints, its stubble, its miry spots, its horrid shadows? His heart failed him, and he was cold with the chill of death. And suddenly a strange buoyancy seemed to possess him; he looked up over his shoulder, and a great form towered there,—a great, beautiful shape clad in white, with long, rosy wings that shed a glow about them.

“Oh, you are going to carry me!” cried Rafe.

"No," said the angel, "you are going to walk. I am going to walk with you."

"What is your name?" said Rafe, looking up again wonderingly.

"I am called the Love of God," said the angel; and he put his strong, warm hand under Rafe's arm, and they began to move. And half the weary length of the long way was behind them; and at the roughest places that strong, warm hand seemed to lift Rafe so that his feet skimmed over the top of the flints and the prickly stubble and never felt them. And they left storm and cloud far aside, and the miry spots were but pools reflecting heaven, — in one of them he saw a star when he could see no star in the sky. And he was up on the clear, high level, twilight and blue darkness wrapping the country he had crossed, the steps of home shining in the yet higher light, when the pleasant wind gave a great sob and he woke to hear Bridget cry, "Oh, for the love of God, docthor dear, you do be hurting the b'y!"

He had probably dreamed all this while Bridget was exclaiming and the doctor was lift-

ing him. He was not in any pain, but he was quite angry with Bridget for waking him. Yet it was a delightful dream that Bridget had given him, — an immensely vivid dream to him; it all swept over him again. Then he looked up at her and smiled. And Bridget threw her apron over her head, crying, "Oh the poor craythur!" and running from the room.

There had been an injury to the spinal cord, occasioning a temporary paralysis, and he could not speak. But he had no desire to speak. He closed his eyes and thought over his pleasant dream; its meaning flashed through his brain like a light. He was drowsing off again, and seemed to hear the angel say: "Any love helps, you know. But the Love of God helps and lifts, too."

He was saying it to himself as he woke again and saw his mother sitting by the bedside crying. That was a love that hurt, he thought. He did not like to see her crying; it declared that something dreadful was the matter with him. His poor little ailing mother, who had such trouble with her strong, unruly brood, —

he was sorry to have her feel so distressed. She held his limp hand in hers. He tried to tell her not to worry, to say he was all right. His eyes darkened with horror when he found that even a sound was impossible. He was faint and everything was growing black. But there was his mother still crying, — he must reassure her, at any rate. The will to do it seemed to tingle through him as if he had caught hold of a huge magnet, and suddenly his mother exclaimed, "Oh, he understands! He is conscious! He has pressed my hand!"

"He will come round then," said the doctor. "The vitality of youth is an enormous element. It has given new life to the nerve force."

"It was love that gave it," thought Rafe, and he pressed his mother's hand again.

"Oh, my dear boy!" she cried, wiping his forehead and her own eyes. "My darling one! It is too great an effort!"

"It has saved him," the doctor said. "He might have sunk away into nothingness but for that effort."

"But for that love," thought Rafe. "That was

the love that helps," he thought, as he fell off to sleep again.

"And the Love of God helps and lifts, too," said the angel in his thoughts.

It was some time after this, when he could both speak and move his arms, that Miss Persis, to whom he had told his dream, which was still such a real thing to him, and who often left the children to their own devices that she might come and relieve his mother, was sitting beside his bed and reading. She read in a low and lulling tone the Twenty-third Psalm. "He leadeth me beside the still waters," she said.

"Oh, they are very still waters!" exclaimed Rafe, with a weary bitterness.

"I suppose you mean," said Miss Persis, "that this pain and paralysis seem cruel."

"Of course I do!" he cried.

"Don't you think, Rafe dear," said poor Miss Persis, "that you are very young to — to pass sentence on God?" She hesitated, thinking he might not understand her, but went on, remembering how preternaturally illness sometimes sharpens the understanding, as a pear ripens first

round the sting of the wasp. "Don't you think that you are — that I am — too small and dull to attempt to solve the riddle of the universe? The best minds have failed to solve that riddle, to discover the mystery of pain. Do you suppose you can?"

"I can feel it," said Rafe, grimly.

"I don't suppose," she said, "that you ever, on a spring morning, when you saw the sky burning velvet-blue behind the rosy apple blossoms, the air clear as crystal and overflowing with sunshine, were filled with a sense of the beauty of the world, every one of your nerves thrilling with the joy of it?"

"I don't know," said Rafe.

"Or, on a summer evening, when all was tender purple and stars looked down from far above and up from far beneath, and you heard bells ringing over the water, and the breath of a flower floated by like a waft of the air of another world?"

"I don't know," said Rafe, again. "No, I guess not. I didn't want to go to bed, though. Yes, I suppose so."

"And I have been, too. And I felt as if it were God's very word spoken to me,—His own voice and message. And my heart sprang to hear it, and I answered Him with my joy."

"Well, may be," said Rafe, rather indifferently.

"And do you suppose it may not be that when some pain as sharp, some suffering as strong in its way as the joy was in that way, comes to us, and again makes every nerve thrill and answer, it isn't equally a message from God,—that He is not saying that word also to us?"

"Why?" demanded Rafe. "I hadn't done anything! Oh, I never did anything very, very wrong, you know—would you fix the pillows, Miss Persis? They are so hot! I am so tired!—except to make John mind, and he ought to mind."

"‘Why?’ That is the question the thinkers of all time have asked," Miss Persis said, as she made him easier. "And no one knows the answer. We only know there must be an answer, because God is good."

"How do you know that?" asked Rafe, his

big eyes burning with the pain just then. "If He made pain, was that good?"

"I suppose the dragon-fly, bursting his sheath, suffers pain. But what wings he gets by means of it to fly through all heaven!"

"But why couldn't it have been made so there wouldn't have been the pain?"

"There it is. And we don't know. We do know that suffering, rightly taken, strengthens the wings of the soul and gives them great flight heavenward. And it gives insight, too. You understand what I say to you now, for instance, but six months ago I should not have thought of talking this way."

"Yes," said Rafe, "I have grown so old. I don't have anything to do but to think now and to ache. I'd like to be the way I was six months ago, though! I'm dead tired of wrestling with this pain, Miss Persis."

Miss Persis seldom pitied Rafe in words, fearing her pity might only weaken him. "The young Greeks that you are so fond of reading about," she said, "developed their limbs and muscles with constant struggle and wrestle.

And it really made them resemble the ideal they had of their own gods. Perhaps we grow to resemble our loftier ideal only by struggle and wrestle of the soul, and suffering is the only thing we have to wrestle with. It is like the angel of the Lord that came for the patriarch to wrestle with in the night, you remember. We can't tell what great, fine thing this wrestling may make us. 'For now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be,' " said Miss Persis. "Anyway, pain must be a sort of consecration, Rafe. It brings us nearer to God."

"It does n't me," said Rafe.

"But it will. Suffering is surely the secret place of God, for we cannot penetrate its reason, and, you know, 'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.' If God gives pain, He gives it as He does other blessings —"

"Other blessings!"

"He gives it with His own hand. You take it straight from Him. And how close it brings you —"

"I don't want to be close to any one who gives me such aching. Oh, Miss Persis, let me hold your hand!"

"Don't you remember what the prophet thought God said to him? 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. . . . Fear not; for I am with thee.' That is, you know, if you want Him, if you call."

"Oh, I don't care! I don't care for anything, if I am never to go out again — or run — or grow. It's a little easier now. But I heard the doctors say —"

"If any one took you, Rafe, into a wonderful place, all shining and clear, with steps leading up into the very courts of heaven, only you were blind and could not see a thing of the glory and loveliness, and a hand came and tore away the film over your eyes, even if it hurt, would you not love the hand? Some time, because of this pain and suffering, your larger vision will see into a world of which you do not dream to-day.

And I suppose there must be an especial purpose in opening your eyes to it. Now I think it is time for nourishment — ”

“It’s always time for something hateful,” said Rafe.

And while Miss Persis sat and softly sang, Rafe shut his eyes and tried to sleep and could not and had to think. And what he thought was that there was no power on earth to help him, and where could he look for help? Too young, too weak, too ignorant to reach it, in the long midnights when sleep failed him, in the long hours before the gray of dawn, it must have been that the Lord’s protection came to the child, called him by name, and wrapped him round.

It was several weeks later that Miss Persis had been reading in Revelation a chapter that always took Rafe’s fancy with the story of the city of jewels descending out of heaven from God. “‘Neither shall there be any pain there,’” she repeated, after she had finished it. The night was warm, and the window was opened wide, and the curtains drawn apart, and Rafe, among his pillows, could see the moon flooding

all the sapphire hollow of the sky with light. There had been a storm in the distance, and some enormous snowy clouds were piled in lofty masses above a base of low, purple thunder-clouds where the silent lightnings still shot to and fro, and every few moments the reflection of the lightnings filled the high, snowy masses with a splendor of quivering, wavering, evanescent flame, till they seemed like towers of fire-opal itself.

"You can almost see it now," said Rafe,—"that city."

"What a beautiful world it is!" said Miss Persis, as she built up his pillows again. "What a beautiful being God must be to have dreamed of such beauty and to have made it—if it is not, indeed, a part of Him."

"Yes," said Rafe.

"See the moon—how she rides up in majesty."

"She is like a queen going to her palace,—that great tower there in the clouds," said Rafe.

"Yes. We are so apt to personify the wonderful things of nature. Are you quite comfortable now? But she is not a queen; she is not mov-

ing consciously, nor of herself. It is the force of God that moves her, as it is that bursts the flower from the bud, that brings the fragrance of the honeysuckle to you on the breath of the night."

"And that makes me see the beauty of it all," said Rafe.

"If beauty is a part of God," Miss Persis said, after they had looked out in silence a little while, "how freely He is giving Himself to us all the time! How He must love us! For you see beauty is everywhere, in the crystal of the grain of sand as much as in the high arch of heaven. How can one see the summer night—that pale, far planet there, like an outpost of universes yet beyond—and not believe in God and not love Him?"

"I do believe in Him, Miss Persis," said Rafe. "I do love Him."

Sitting in the window-seat, Miss Persis began softly to sing the Hundredth Psalm to a sweet old chant, the moonlight falling over her. Rafe had heard it many times, but it seemed to him that night, hearing it, as if he had gone a little

way behind the words and the music into the heart of things.

"One almost thinks," said Miss Persis, presently, "that what the apostle said of faith, that it is the evidence of things not seen, is hardly the whole of truth on such a night as this."

"When we feel as if we could see so far into heaven," said Rafe.

"But what a mighty thing faith is," she went on, as if thinking aloud. "I wonder a boy needs anything more heroic to fire his fancy to great deeds than the tremendous words about those 'who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.'"

"Oh!" said Rafe, "I shall never do anything like that! I shall only be lying here."

"That is not so sure," said Miss Persis. "But if you do there will be some reason for it. I was reading the other day what Fra Ugo Bassi said in the hospital where the people, lying in

their beds in five converging chambers, heard him. Although I do not believe all as he did, yet I find the thought great and beautiful, and so will you. Suffering is the cup that we all pray may pass from us; and Fra Ugo Bassi says,—

‘But if Himself He come to thee, and stand
Beside thee, gazing down on thee with eyes
That smile, and suffer—that will smite thy heart
With their own pity to a passionate peace—
And reach to thee Himself the Holy Cup
(With all its wreathen stems of passion-flowers
And quivering sparkles of the ruby stars),
Pallid and royal, saying, “Drink with Me,”
Wilt thou refuse? Nay, not for Paradise!
The pale brow will compel thee, the pure hands
Will minister unto thee; thou shalt take
Of that communion through the solemn depths
Of the dark waters of thine agony
With heart that praises Him, that yearns to Him
The closer through that hour. Hold fast His hand
Though the nails pierce thine, too! Take only care
Lest one drop of the sacramental wine
Be spilled, of that which ever shall unite
Thee, soul and body, to thy living Lord!
Therefore gird up thyself, and come to stand
Unflinching under the unfaltering hand
That waits to prove thee to the uttermost.
It were not hard to suffer by His hand
If thou couldst see His face—but in the dark!
That is the one last trial: be it so.’”

"In the dark," said Rafe; "that is what faith is for, I suppose; that is where the angel in my dream helps, too."

"For to believe in God is to love Him; and love is that strong angel," said Miss Persis.

"But always to be lying here is so hard, Miss Persis!"

"Yet so much easier for the company of that great angel with the rosy wings."

"And never to do anything for Him!"

"How can you tell?" coming back from the window where she had lingered and bringing him a rose with the dew on it. "Sometimes I think what a wonder may be wrought," she said, "by such long preparation and the sanctification of pain. When I look forward I see a man fitted by it for work among the toiling millions in the far east, in the islands of the sea, with the cowboys of the plains, in the dark quarters of the city, for God's work anywhere, everywhere! I hear his voice like a silver trumpet telling the message suffering has brought him, the cheer the love of God has taught him —"

"Oh, Miss Persis!"

"But, even if that never comes, it may be something greater and better yet just to lie and bear God's will—to lie in the daily and hourly touch of His hand—doing something for Him so every suffering moment. It must be a vast and wonderful work that needs such a lifetime for making ready, as if some knight forged his own armor piece by piece and kept his vigil, too."

"Oh, Miss Persis, you put the heart in one so!"

"No, not I, but that strong angel, the Love of God, whose touch makes suffering sweet, even if it does not make its reason plain. Perhaps only when I meet you yourself—a great, swift seraph sweeping through space on your divine errand—shall I know what all this meant, this weary time of pain and suffering in the dark."

"It is n't always in the dark," said Rafe.

THE LITTLE BLACK FIDDLE.

THE LITTLE BLACK FIDDLE.

IT hung in the garret, on one of the big nails there, all around it the usual lumber of an old house, — trunks, broken chairs, a superannuated chest of drawers, a spinning-wheel, cobwebs.

Years and years ago a tramp had been taken in at the door in a fainting condition. He lay all day in stupor on the settee where they had placed him; and, moved with pity, and in some slight consternation as to what was to become of him, and of themselves too, if this state continued, the household did what they could for him. Just before dark he began to murmur a broken jargon of English and foreign tongues, and took his little black fiddle from his side, and gave it to Mr. Martin with as impressive an air as if he bestowed a kingdom, the children looking on,

wide-eyed and open-mouthed. Then he died, and was buried, and nobody ever knew anything further about him; and the children twanged the fiddle awhile, and at last it was hung up in the garret, and there had been the end of it.

The little fiddle hung forgotten on its nail; but the children grew in strength and beauty every day, and made the house nearly as lively as the ark must have been in all the forty days before it rested on Ararat. Sometimes the little fiddle vibrated to their laughter, and gave it a faint echo from its hollow breast, but that was all the share it had in it.

What a cheerful group they were, Belle and Jessie and Fred and Frank, and the twins always rolling over each other, and chuckling as if that were the freshest joke in the world. They were just as cheerful when a dozen years had passed, and the children were becoming men and women, childish boisterousness was turning into high-bred gayety, and the special talent was developing that belonged to each of them.

But the general talent of that family was for charity. They had a genius for it, — a genius, as

Mrs. Martin's neighbors used to say, for turning themselves out of the house in order to let somebody else in : a little house, but the largest you ever knew, for it held the most, — hospitable to rich and poor, the wayfarer never leaving it unrefreshed, the sufferer uncomforted.

Yet the means to do so much were but limited. Mr. Martin had but a small income ; Mrs. Martin found it necessary to count every penny twice over, to turn and piece and remake, and never to waste a crumb. But, when that was all done, there was always something left for the widow and fatherless ; and the moment there was anything to do, either for North Street or the Five Points or Borrioboola, Mrs. Martin's door was the one first rapped at. And what a vivid interest it was that was taken throughout that house in every case that came up, from the time the little bright heads could cluster together, the little fingers hold a needle, the little legs run an errand ! You could never see a prettier sight than those bright heads, those glowing faces, those pitying eyes. "My bunch of blossoms," Mr. Martin used to call them, and say they gave

their honey to every bee that vagabondized about them. And by and by, when Belle was eighteen, and Jessie just turning sixteen, and the rest coming on, this same sympathy with all suffering was as active as of old; and Jessie's lovely face seemed every day to grow lovelier with the melting tenderness she felt to every one that needed gentle word or deed; and when she sang her songs in the evening, the trait seemed somehow to have strained itself through the rich sweet tones of her voice, and to make the hearer's heart respond to its touch and always fill his eyes with tears.

"Our Jessie," the father used to say, "ought to have different instruction with that voice. If you had n't been such a Sandemanian, wife, all your life, we should have laid by enough to send her to Italy and have her voice cultivated as it should be."

"Well, dear, would you throw away all your pleasant memories of pain relieved and all the benefit it has wrought the children's characters, and take it out in music?" his wife would ask. "I should like to have Jessie's voice attended

to ; but, bless you, it might do her more harm than good."

"Harm !" said Belle once, as they talked it over.

"Yes, dear ; we all have our vanities, and to nurse one's pride —"

"Oh, mamma, but to stand up and lift a thousand people on your voice as if it were wings for them ! Think of that, — of the delight she could give so many, and then of the fortune she could make and the things she could do ! We would have that children's hospital, and —"

"Very true," sighed Mrs. Martin.

"Very true," sighed her husband. "It would take fifteen hundred dollars to send Jessie to Italy. She would be too old to have it do her voice any good by the time I could get so much together." And just there came in the minister's wife to see about the concert she was getting up for the benefit of the poor De Sarcie children, whose parents — lately organist and soprano in the little church — were lost in the "Destroyer" on their way to Europe for some purpose, at which concert Jessie was to sing a song, if she could find the courage.

"You need n't be afraid, Jessie," said the minister's good wife; "there's nobody in the audience knows a note more music than you do."

"Oh, but *he* will, — the violinist, you know; and Madame Reuter, if she comes —"

"She's coming. We're to pay expenses. And she represented the case to Signor Pazzani, and told him they were the children of musicians, and he volunteered. It was too good of him! They're to stay with me."

"Oh, not both of them, Mrs. King; one's enough, with all your care. Send one here," said Mrs. Martin.

"Well, I should be glad to, really. I'll send you the signor. Now, Jessie, sing 'The harp that once through Tara's halls,' just as if you were on the platform, and we were all down on the seats before you."

And so Jessie sang it, and her voice swelled out as if a young sibyl sang, with the words,

"Thus Freedom now so seldom wakes —
The only throb she gives
Is when some heart indignant breaks,
To show that still she lives."

And the minister's wife cried and went home.

One afternoon next week Madame Reuter came down, and Mrs. King brought the Signor Pazzani into the Martins' parlor, and left him.

It was not much preparation the Martins had been able to make for their distinguished guest; they could only fill his room full to overflowing with Belle's flowers, that grew and blossomed in every window the winter long. As for their table, it was always a miracle of snow and silver and parsley-trimmed dishes, and it was impossible for them to make much difference. They found, though, that it was of no consequence, for the signor was indifferent to everything but bread and fruit and salad, and presently looked about him for the young lady who was to sing. "You are she," he said presently to Jessie, and began talking with her about her music while he crumbled his bread. But it was not till some hours after they left the table that he came down from his room and demanded to hear what she could do.

Poor Jessie had no more idea of hesitating or refusing than if an angel of annunciation had appeared and bidden her. She went instantly

to the piano, though Belle ran before her to play the accompaniment. Belle had to play the prelude twice over, though, before Jessie could command her voice; and in the first measures it trembled so that she was afraid she would have to stop, and she was pale as death. "Courage, courage, my child," cried the signor, and she took a little and went on. And soon she forgot the signor and her fright, and was singing as freely as a bird in the wildwood. "It is grand! it is delicious!" cried the signor, in his own tongue, which Jessie and Belle understood tolerably. "It is a voice in a thousand. In a thousand? A voice in millions! It is the nightingale's! and it must have care, study, training—Italy."

Jessie shook her head, and felt very much like crying. She knew if she ever showed the least desire for Italy, her father would cramp himself, her mother forego her comforts, the children deny themselves everything; they would sell the piano, move into a meaner house, live on little, give nothing away. She had never intimated that she thought the thing worth while.

Now she shook her head again and ventured to say in such Italian as she had: "It is impossible. Please don't speak of it; it would only make grief here. But thank you for the kind words."

And then the signor gazed hard at the lovely face with its Madonna-like oval, and its great soft dark eyes, and said: "Nothing is impossible. Now I must seek my violin. It was to come by express, but has not, the good house-mother says."

No; it had not come, and, what was more, it never would come in its old shape. The express had met with an accident, and all its contents had been shattered. The violin that the Queen of Holland had given Signor Pazzani, that Jacques Stainer had made himself in the Tyrol two hundred years ago and more, was nothing but a handful of chips.

It would have been ludicrous, if it had not been in reality harrowing, to see the signor's grief and rage when he heard of the destruction of his darling, and had the broken bits put into his hand. He remembered nothing more about Jessie's voice, about the evening concert; he sat

down among the fragments, like Marius in the ruins of Carthage, and bewailed himself.

It was an intensely cold and still winter's day; there was not a sound to be heard in the village, save now and then a distant sleigh-bell, the dropping of some huge icicle, or the loud report of some nail as it sprung with the frost in the rafters. As the signor sat there now with the broken volute of his violin in his left hand, and the other hand wound in his hair distractedly, one of these nails went off, as you might say, with more of an explosion than usual upon the frosty silence of the afternoon, followed by a clear resonant note that for half a moment seemed to fill the house with a silvery vibration. They all heard it, and looked up bewildered; and suddenly Jessie, with a joyous cry, sprang to her feet and darted from the room. The garret door had been left open by somebody, she found. In a moment she was back, and had placed in the hands of the signor, whose mood of frenzy had been succeeded by one of silent desperation, the little black fiddle.

"It fell from its nail," she was saying. "It

was that we heard. It wanted to come and comfort you, you see. Is it good for anything? Can you mend your own with it? It is so old!"

"Why do you bring me this, my child?" he asked sadly, but took it, and ran his eye over it. Something seemed to strike him as he did so. He bent his head quickly, lifted the violin to his ear, and tapped it and listened, ran his finger down its lines, took out his handkerchief and dusted it minutely. His hands began to shake. He was holding his breath. He was comparing the measurements of the little black fiddle with certain figures in a memorandum-book drawn from his pocket. He peered into its every dimension in a sort of mad haste. He took a magnifier, and then with a bit of chamois leather began rubbing the end of the little black fiddle as if he were polishing a jewel. All at once he cried out, —

"Aha! Behold it! It is here! Read it, my children, read! '*Sotto la disciplina d' A. Stradivarius, Cremona. I H⁺ S.*' It is his, the Giuseppe del Jesu's, when the great Antoine was his master. That is his seal, that '*I H⁺ S.*' Oh, the

rogue! But he knew music! And Antoine Stradivarius has had it in his hands; has looked at its sides, its table, its *ouïes*, its lustrous varnish; has drawn the bow across it; has said it was good! Quick! where are my strings? We will see; we will see. There is no bridge. That is all right. The bridge would not have answered. My Stainer bridge is whole yet."

He was silent in a long but hurried unrolling and fastening of strings, an endless tuning and hearkening and tuning again, and then the walls of the room were vibrant about them, and Signor Pazzani was playing on the little black fiddle; and the sweet, powerful sonority, the suave, silvery, intense tone, the mellow but majestic strength, were ringing in their ears "Like the humming of a swarm of angels' wings," said the signor, suddenly leaving off, with his bow in the air.

"Ah, look at it! What grace in the curves! how severe the volute! how elastic and bounding the tone! and the color! How purple and rich and full of lustres it will come out when I shall restore it! Oh, I shall restore it!" he



cried gayly, smiling on them one and all. "It will be mine. You will not think of keeping it. You can none of you play on it," he began to implore. "It's a Guarnerius, the Giuseppe del Jesu's. It is worth money—it is worth more; you shall have a thousand, you shall have fifteen hundred, you shall have two thousand dollars for it!"

"Oh, hush, indeed!" cried Jessie. "Of course you shall have it, Sir. It is valueless to us; it is yours!"

"Stay, stay a moment, Jessie," said her father. "The little black fiddle is mine. That poor old vagabond, fallen from his high estate, gave it to me. It is a way bread has of coming back upon the waters after many days. If the signor wants to pay me a thousand dollars for it, we will compass the other five hundred by ourselves, and you shall go to Italy."

And the next morning Signor Pazzani went off with the little black fiddle tucked under his arm, and Mr. Martin went to the city with him to secure the passage of Jessie and her aunt in the next steamer that sailed for foreign shores. And

the little fiddle had some share in it, after all. And one day, Lucia wrote from Italy to Marnie Maurice that the most beautiful singing she had ever heard in her life, oh, singing sweet as any angel's could be, sweet as a silver flute, had turned out to be Jessie Martin's, and she must make haste and come with her own delicious voice to the same master. And Jessie wrote to Hester that there might be mansions in heaven as lovely as the old palace up in the Sicilian hills where Marnie was going some day to stay with Lucia, but she didn't see how they could be lovelier. And Lucia wrote a postscript saying that Hester would have to come and see,—which shows how small the world is, and that there is not a very great distance in reality between the Gulf of Palermo and the Bay of Pango Pango on the other side of the earth.

**BILLY AND HIS GRAND-
MOTHER.**

BILLY AND HIS GRANDMOTHER.

SOMETIMES, in one or other of the vacations, Miss Marks took Hester home with her to the college city where her own friends lived ; and it was there that she made friends with Billy McKilly and his grandmother. The dear grandmother used to tell Hester stories of her own far-away youth ; and in return Hester told her of the life in the far-away South Sea Islands. And when Billy understood that Hester had lived where palm-trees grew, that her father had miles of cocoanut trees, that she was acquainted with beautiful wild peacocks, and with a bat whose wings opened almost wider than he could stretch his arms, then she seemed to him a part of the unknown and foreign regions where menageries and circuses came from. And you can imagine if he did not

regard her with favor when you are told that there was nothing in the world that seemed to him so fine as a circus.

Billy lived in that part of the town known as Library Close. And although there was a great entertainment of wild beasts and riders and acrobats coming to town, it seemed to him the strangest thing that the fact made so little impression on the people of Library Close, with whom apparently the world went on as if a circus were no more than a fly on the wall. And such a circus, too! He had told Hester about it, hoping to fire her imagination to a point that might benefit himself. He wanted her to have the great pleasure of going; but he meant to contrive a way for himself, even if he had to crawl under the tent. But he preferred to go in an honorable way, and to that end he was continually running in, all eagerness and perspiration,—the dear little rosy urchin,—to tell his grandmother some new feature of the billboards. And here it was the very day, and no one had said a word to him or to Hester about it!

"It's the tallest giraffe you ever saw. It is truly, grandmother! Its neck goes 'way up to the top of the bill boards. And there's a Bengal tiger, and a Nafrican lion —"

"How you talk!"

"And a white peacock, and a phœnix —"

"No!"

"Yes; there's the picture of it rising from the ashes. And it's — it's quite wonderful, grandmother. And there's the unicorn —"

"Pooh, pooh!"

"Why, grandmother, it's on the bill! I saw it!"

"But there is n't any such animal."

"Perhaps it is n't an animal. Is a — is a bird an animal? Do you suppose Sindbad's roc was an animal, grandmother?"

"No, I don't," said grandmother shortly, snipping off her thread.

"Well, then, the unicorn may be something like that."

"Yes," said his grandmother, "exactly like that."

"I don't know," said Billy, looking at her

wistfully. "It sounds as if you were making fun. But there it is in the picture, the lion and the unicorn a-fighting for the crown —"

"My darling Billy, my dear little innocent," cried grandmother, fumbling for her peppermints, "could you think your old grandmother made fun of you? Why, I've no more doubt of it than nothing at all!"

"Did n't you ever see a circus, grandmother? Never?"

"No, never. They did n't have them where I lived."

"Why — what — what sort of a place —" with some diffidence, and a look of wonder in his big blue eyes.

"Oh, a very good place — except that they did n't have circuses there."

"Oh!" said Billy, then, with infinite compassion in his tone.

"And when I grew up I was in a city. And I was busy. I went to other places. I was ignorant. I did n't know a circus was so delightful."

"It is delightful. Is n't it, grandmother?"

"Why, you tell me so. That's a big peppermint. I thought of you when I sent for the heart-shaped ones. You have such a warm little heart of your own."

"I wish you could see a circus, grandmother dear."

"I've no doubt I should enjoy it," said grandmother, with calmness.

"Oh, I know you would!"

"But circuses are not for me."

"I don't see why."

"Don't see why," with less calmness, "when I can't move out of my chair all day, and only look at the world from that little balcony half full of flower-boxes?"

"I suppose you could be carried in the handbarrow," said Billy, doubtfully.

Grandmother laughed. "Do you think I am like the girl in the song?" said she. And then she sang in her sweet, thin old voice,—

"No, I won't be a nun,
Oh, I won't be a nun,
I am so fond of pleasure
I could never be a nun!"

"But I don't want you to be a nun," said Billy, a little undetermined regarding her meaning. "I only want you to go to the circus."

"What would be said of a person who wanted to see a circus so badly she had to be carried to it in a barrow! They'd take her for another clown. It would be worse than the old woman on her white horse at Banbury Cross."

"Did that mean Queen Elizabeth, grandmother? There's a picture of her in my history on her white horse."

"Dear soul, how many questions you do ask!"

"Well," said Billy, when he had satisfactorily tipped a thimble on the end of his nose, "you know if you didn't want to go all the way to the tent and see the whole Show, part of it comes out in the streets, and you could see that if you would go over to Capitol Street."

"Why, Billy McKilly, what are you thinking of? It's half a mile! I do wish you'd let my work-basket alone."

"Well, it's worth going a whole mile to see. Can't I have that thimble, grandmother?"

"That thimble? I don't know. What do you want it for?"

"It's got a hole in it. It'd make an elegant sinker, you know."

"Oh, I don't want you to go fishing. I'm afraid you'll get drowned. No, you can't have the thimble."

"As if I was a girl! Men don't get drowned when they go a fishing. I'll run it full of lead. Oh, grandmother, I wish you could go to the circus! I should so like to take you to the circus! I should like to hear you laugh when the clown gets the whip cracked at him. It makes your heart just beat when you see the great tent swell up there, and the sun shine through the flag on top of it, and all the other tents round it. You don't know, you don't know what it means, you know—you only know it's—it's fine!" cried Billy. "And there's all sorts of a crowd outside, and men hollering, and men asleep in the grass under the edge of the tent—they've been up all night loading and unloading, and driving stakes, and stretching canvas. And when you go inside, it seems as if the roof was

a ground-glass shade, you know ; and the smell of the grass is just the sweetest smell, and there's crowds and crowds of faces, and it's warm, and there's lemonade, pink lemonade. And they come riding in. Oh, it's splendid ! the knights and ladies dressed in gold cloth — and the clown — he bets he can do what the others do, and makes a mess of it, and he winks at you and puts his finger through the paper hoops — ”

“ He's a sort of bad, silly boy grown up, I suppose,” said grandmother.

“ I don't know. Sometimes he makes believe he's astonished at the others, and then all of a sudden he turns a somerset over the backs of four elephants at once and does better'n all ! And oh, you are so pleased, and you clap and holler like everything ! And then there's the beautiful lady in short dresses dancing on horse-back — I suppose she's a lady. But perhaps — ”

“ She's a fairy ? ”

“ There ain't any such thing, grandmother ! I should think you thought I was a little boy ! ”

“ Dear sakes, no ! ”

“ And there's the flying trapeze, too,” Billy

resumed, "if you don't shut your eyes. And there's a boy rides round the ring standing on one foot on a horse without a saddle, going lickety-split, and the band plays every minute, and the ring-master — oh, he's a daisy!"

"What does he do? Yes, that's a darning-needle, and that's a mattress needle, and this is a common needle, and you may thread it for me. Why, Billy McKilly, are you left-handed?"

"No. But — you see — Oh, he cracks his whip, and he says, 'This way, Mr. Merryman,' and they all mind him like a row of bricks. I'd like to be that boy hanging by his chin on the flying trapeze. I'd be scared — but I'd like to do it. I'd like to be the clown, too," said Billy, his eyes at all sorts of angles with the needle's eye.

"You put me in mind of Nick Bottom. There, give it to me. I'd be ashamed if I couldn't thread a needle."

"Was he a clown? So would I if I was a girl. It's just the best fun being a clown —"

"I've heard that sometimes clowns are very melancholy people, Billy."

"Oh, they could n't be! Why, they're made to make folks laugh. They're just as happy — they always have a trick horse to sell, and his name is January. I wish my father'd buy him — You'd see a clown riding on a donkey, wrong end first, in the parade, if you could go down to Capitol Street. I wish you could go, grandmother," twisting the scissors round his thumb till they were in danger of flying off and putting an end to seeing altogether.

"Well, yes, so do I. But I can't, my dear little son. So let us talk of something else. And don't bite that wax any more, if you please; it is n't made to chew."

"I don't believe you ever saw a parade, or you would n't want to talk of something else," said Billy, reproachfully.

"No, I never did. Now, Billy, that's a glove needle, and that's a bodkin. Put them right back where you took them from!"

"Never — saw — a — circus — parade! Oh, grandmother!" half under his breath, as if the neglect in her education must not be spoken of too loudly. "Then it's all the more reason you

should see this," he exclaimed, dropping the wax and the scissors and the bodkin. "Why, it's the biggest circus in the whole world! And it's the biggest parade in America. It's the great Biblical and Scrip-tural show —"

"Is it, truly? A real holy show? Now, if you'll kindly pick up the things you dropped —"

"Yes, I will—I will. But I wish you could see that parade. Why, there's a troop of elephants —"

"A troop of elephants! I should want to run the first thing, and I could n't. So, you see, it's just as well as it is."

"Oh, no, indeed, they're tame as cats. They let you ride on their backs —"

"I should look pretty, riding on their backs!"

"But, grandmother—somehow—you seem —"

"Very disappointing. Well, my poor, dear little man, it's a shame! If a boy can't have sympathy from his grandmother, what is she good for? Yes, I should like to see the parade," drawing him to her, kissing his chubby brown fist, and smoothing back the rebellious locks from Billy's honest brow. "And as that is impossible, you tell me all about it."

"Well," said Billy, squaring himself for the effort, "Johnny Carey saw it over in Sunderland, and he says it's over a mile long,—almost. And after the elephants there's a lot of camels with red saddle-cloths, and they look patient—that's their necks—and they look cross—that's their faces—and they have door-mats, sort of, on their shoulders, and an Arab riding every one, a real Arab, grandmother, with his long pipe in his mouth. And there's a girl driving forty horses—yes, there is, Johnny says so! My! And there's a team with a pair of lions chained by the feet, and standing by each lion is another girl. Shouldn't you think they'd be afraid? I shouldn't. But they're girls, you know. I'd like to do— And then," said Billy, catching himself in season, "there's ladies and gentlemen on horseback; and there's the great gold chariots with brass bands in them; and there's cages and cages of animals, all locked up, except the polar bear, and he's sitting on a block of ice, and the men turn buckets of water over him when they come to a hydrant—he's homesick, too. And there's the—the proprietor, they call him—the

master of it all, in a buggy. And it's a great deal, you know, just to see him —"

"I should like to see him," admitted grandmother.

"Oh, I thought you would!" said Billy. "And there's a lot of Shetland ponies, the teentiest tauntiest little things, with the little boy and girl each riding one of them, and everybody cries out at that, you know, and cheers them — I'd like to be — And there's the donkeys," said Billy, catching himself again, "and the trick mules and the clowns, and the — oh, I forgot the best of all! There's a whole regiment — I guess — of soldiers riding in red coats, with little flags on the tips of their spears — the Boston lancers —"

"Oh, no, not in a circus! Not in that sort of a circus."

"Well, then, the Cadets."

"Oh, no, it can't be!"

"Why not?"

"Why not, indeed," said grandmother.

"Well, then, maybe it's zouaves. But at any rate, grandmother, they're soldiers, they truly are, real live men who've been in war —"

"Fine work for them now, then."

"Yes, isn't it?" said the innocent Billy. "And, grandmother, don't you think I might stay out of school, just this morning?"

"And is that what it all means? Oh, Billy!" said grandmother. "Well, then, you dear rogue, yes, you may. Run along! I'll make it right with your father."

"Grandmother," said Billy, getting her head in his arms and hugging it to the ruin of her cap, "you are the dearest dear! You're a great deal better than Johnny Carey's grandmother. She's awful strict with Johnny. She makes him learn a verse of a Psalm every time he turns 'round. She made him go to bed without his supper the night he ran away to Sunderland, and they had raspberry jam that night, too. I'm glad you're my grandmother. You're the best grandmother I ever had. So!" And having finished hugging her, and having finished, too, the difficult task of setting her work-basket to rights, Billy went to the pretty balcony, with its flowers, and stepped out, and craned his neck up and down the street to ascertain if by any chance one sitting there

could see the great parade as it passed out of Capitol Street into the square.

"It makes a fellow feel mean," said Billy, "to go off and have a good time and leave you here."

"My dear little Billy," said grandmother, "I am having a good time in thinking of your having a good time."

"And you never saw one, either," repeated Billy, like the buzzing of an inextinguishable fly. "I say, it's too bad! And you don't know how splendid the chariots are—and the music—and the clown—oh, he is so funny—sometimes he gets real mad with the boys—If the parade was going to pass through this street—"

"Pass through this street! Why, of course not. It is n't even a street!"

Billy looked up and down. No, it was n't even a street. It was a sort of green court or close. But it had an avenue for carriages in the middle of its velvet turf that led through a broad gateway into the great square of the library buildings and out to the street beyond. Only elegant

carriages now and then rolled along the avenue. Even the grocers' carts with their daring and dexterous Jehus drove up through back alleys to the houses. This was the abode of aristocratic stillness and narrow seclusion. No; no parades ever passed this way. It was n't even a street.

"Grandmother," said Billy, "you promise me to have your chair wheeled out into this balcony, and be sitting here at eleven o'clock, and then, at any rate, perhaps — you'll hear the music."

"Oh, it would n't be worth while," said his grandmother. "It would only be an aggravation."

"Then you do wish you could see it! I knew, I knew you did!" trying to walk around her chair on his hands now.

"Billy! Billy! You'll get the blood in your head!"

"Well, you promise me," as he came up smiling and very red. "I'll feel a great deal easier, grandmother, if I think at any rate you can hear the music. You know they'll likely play 'Boom-de-ay.' Gimme a nickel, grandmother. Oh, I

say, I wish all the fellows had such a grandmother as you!"

There was a twinkle, a strange delighted twinkle, in Billy's eye as he went out singing the last chaste verselet that had caught his ready ear, with its burden concerning a bicycle built for two. But once outside the house silence took the place of song, and Billy was running, almost as fast as the bicycle could go, to the Belt line of cars, which would carry him outside the town.

It was a resolute urchin that, a half-hour later, was knocked about from one employé to another in that busy universe of the circus-field, which seemed to him the great world itself, where the gayly caparisoned horses were pawing, and the elephants were stepping ponderously to the front, — an urchin that would not take no for an answer, and who, at the sight of the kneeling and grunting camels and the strange Arabs mounting them, all at once made a dart from the clutches of the last man who had caught him by the collar to kick him out, and landed in the presence of the Great Man himself.

"Oh, sir!" he cried, panting, almost breathless, climbing up the steps of the victoria. "I want to tell you about my grandmother!"

"My dear child," said the Proprietor of the Greatest Show on Earth, "I have no time to hear about your grandmother."

"But you must," cried Billy. "You must hear! She's my grandmother. She's —"

"Now, my little lad, get right down from there! The horses might start and break your neck —"

"I will — just as soon —"

"Now! Don't you see I'm very busy? Don't you see the Greatest Show on Earth is just starting? Here, Charley, take this boy away!"

But before Charley or any one else could interfere, Billy had climbed into the victoria itself. "Now I sha'n't fall," said he.

"What sort of a persistent little rascal are you?" exclaimed the proprietor.

"Oh, give the kid a chance," said Charley, while Billy stared, too intent to wonder whether the familiarity were profanity, or whether this was a bigger man than the Proprietor.

"Well, now," said the smooth, kind voice of the burly gentleman on the seat, "tell me in three words what it is you want?"

"I want the show — the Greatest Show on Earth —" said Billy, with quick perspicacity.

"That's right, my boy."

"To pass by my grandmother's window."

"Is she on the route?"

"No. Well, no, she is n't. Not — not quite, you know. She's — about — a mile — only just a mile away. In Library Close. And she can't come here. She can't get out of her chair, you know. And she can't see it pass," his words coming like a torrent, and his eyes as big as the lens in the white ostrich's eye. "And she never saw a parade in her life — truly — just think!"

"You don't mean so?" said the gentleman.

"In this enlightened age," said Charley, as he gave his long whip a flourish that brought the snapper under his thumb.

"And she's awful good," Billy's voice rushed on. "She's the best grandmother there ever was. Say! Did n't you ever have a grandmother! Then you know how it is yourself!

And I'd give 'most anything to have her see the parade — only I don't suppose I've got anything you want," with harrowing melancholy for half a moment. "At any rate," in a quick inspiration, "I'd do some work for you! I'd help fix the tents, I'd feed the animals — Say! It must be great fun travelling with them. Ain't it? Just like folks in the Bible, when Isaac's people went for Rebecca! A boy could pass the peanuts — But my grandmother," remembering himself, "she has to sit in her chair all day, and she only sees the things that come to her, and I'd like to have her see the parade first-rate, and you look as if you would, too — "

"Tut, tut, tut!" said the Proprietor. "It's out of the question. Here, Charley, take the little fellow — "

"I know it's a great deal to ask," cried Billy, quickly slipping to the other side of the victoria, out of Charley's reach. "And that's why I ask it. You like to do a great deal. And you give pleasure to lots of people. But there won't be one of them take so much pleasure in this parade as my grandmother would. For she knows all

about camels and elephants and the Bible and soldiers and wild beasts and you. She said she would like to see you. Don't you think you could go a mile out of your way for once, to give my poor old grandmother such a chance? I should feel so mean to go to the circus and think of her at home, and I do so want her to see all she can of it—it's so hard to sit there in her chair all day, and I've heard my father say she's sat up more nights with sick folks than she ever was in bed, and she always has a peppermint for a fellow, and I made her promise to have her chair wheeled out in the balcony at eleven o'clock, but I didn't tell her I was going to ask you, for fear she might be disappointed, though I knew you would if you could, but just to hear the music, and she promised, and oh, wouldn't she be surprised! Perhaps," Billy bubbled on, "you didn't always do the square thing by your grandmother, and now you've got a chance to make it up to her—"

"Oh, here, here, here!" cried the Proprietor, breaking the spell of Billy's glittering eye. "Let us stop this flood of eloquence or the afternoon

performance will be late. He's a whole show and the posters himself—a new feature. What's your name, boy? Billy McKilly? Well, Billy McKilly, sit right down here by me! Everything ready, Charley? The word given? Go ahead, then!" And when the procession moved down the road and wound its way into Capitol Street, there sat Billy with the Proprietor, his blue eyes beaming out of his brown face with every expression of awe, amazement, and joy, leading the whole business.

Proud moment! Proud Billy! Oh, proud, glad Billy! Proud little boys along the way who knew Billy, and knew him for one of themselves, Billy at that eminence, that dizzy pitch of greatness! They hurraed for the Proprietor, they hurraed for the Greatest Show on Earth, they hurraed for Billy. Billy could hardly contain himself for bliss. It is true at moments he longed to stand up and look behind him; that now and then he doubted if he would not rather be one of the hurrahing boys on the sidewalk that could see the parade. But to be the head of the procession, beside the great Proprietor,

leading the parade — that was compensation for all loss. Suddenly he cried out to his companion: "That's the street! That's it! That leads right into the Close and through the Library grounds, and it's all asphalt—if you only, only would turn up that way!"

"Turn up that way, Charley," said the Proprietor. And the victoria turned up toward Library Close, and all the great elephants came trampling after; and the Arabs on their camels turned up, too; and the lady with the lions, and the clowns, and the little Shetlands — Billy did stand up. It was no use. He fairly danced with delight. "Oh!" he cried. "You are a good man! I think my grandmother would like to kiss you!"

And what did all the fine secluded people of the Close think, when through the wide-open gates poured a rabble of little boys, of rude men smoking pipes, of women carrying their babies, of idle girls with their soiled finery, chewing gum and chaffing their young men, a rabble of all sorts and conditions, the dust of an army rising with them, and the carriage drawn by eight

matched, matchless horses, holding a bland old gentleman and an excited little boy, followed by the grand parade of the Greatest Show on Earth? Far too fine to go to the circus themselves, was it possible that the circus had come to them, that the great Orient itself, the islands of the sea, and all the kingdoms of the world were rendering tribute to the Close?

"There she is! There she is!" suddenly cried the little boy, pointing with both hands at a flowery balcony where sat a pale, fair old lady, with her maid behind her, her face like a flower among the flowers — wondering, smiling, a little frightened, and all at once surveying Billy with amazement. "Oh, grandmother!" shrieked Billy. "You said you would like to see him, and here he is!"

The Proprietor stood up in the carriage, turned and lifted his hat, and bowed. The pale and fair old lady gazed bewilderedly, but bowed in return; and then she smiled and bowed again. The maid bowed, too. And then — whisper it please, on account of the Close people — what less could grandmother do than break off a bit of the clove-

gillyflower and give it to the maid, who tossed it down! The Proprietor caught it and put it in his button-hole, and lifted his hat in stately fashion once more. "And, grandmother," Billy was crying, "I want you to look! He's brought it around on purpose for you to see. It's the Greatest Show on Earth! They're real soldiers—they're Uhlans! That's a real girl driving the forty horses. You just look at the elephants! That near one has killed ten men! And you ought to have heard the camels when the Arabs got on them. They truly are Arabs, they live in the oases of the desert in tents—he says so. And don't you be afraid of that lion, grandmother dear! I ain't. He has n't a tooth in his head, and—"

And the victoria passed on, and the elephants went trampling a cloud of dust about their majesty, and a band burst forth anew in a blare of a glorious tune, and Billy McKilly was out of hearing. But I heard that the people of Library Close went to the circus that afternoon in a body.

REMADE.

REMADE.

IT was really to old Dr. Derwent that Hester owed one of her best friends, although she never saw the doctor.

He had been called once to a case, far up among the hills, a long day's journey, or a night's, rather, and having finished all that there was to do he was refreshing himself by a stroll through the domain of the little mountain village, and letting the cool winds, that had in them a breath of the snow left in the crannies of the hills, blow out of his mind and heart the memory of the suffering he had lately witnessed, when he came, unobserved by them, upon a group of children playing on the threshing-floor of an open barn, with such singing and chirruping of gay young voices as if a whole choir of birds had been let loose at once.

The doctor watched these blithe little creatures for a long while, too tired just then to join them, as he would have liked to do, and attracting no attention from them. But at last the object to which his glances most frequently returned was a little girl sitting apart in a corner by herself, and playing, all alone, with an abstraction and concentration worthy of better dolls. For hers were made of the clumps of grass turned backward from their roots, which roots, with their fibres combed out by a pin, served for well-wigged heads. The little maid had dressed these model dolls out in various green array; one of them had a little pink mushroom secured to her for an umbrella; and she was just pinning a maple-leaf shawlwise upon another, when the doctor addressed her, and asked her name.

"May Roberts, sir," she answered him, still adjusting the troublesome maple-leaf, and without pausing to glance up.

"Oh, May, is it you?" said the doctor, in a way he had of beginning a new acquaintance with a child as if it were an old one, in order that he might amuse himself somewhat by



watching the children puzzled thus into a fancy that they ought to have remembered him.

"Yes, sir," she answered, looking up this time so that he observed, with a sudden start—for he had only seen before a pretty pink and white cheek, shaded by chestnut curls—that her large brown eyes were badly crossed, and her mouth was disfigured, in spite of its little teeth, as white and even as grains of rice, by a hare-lip. "Yes, sir; but"—with hesitation—"I'm afraid I don't know who you are."

"Never mind that," said the doctor, sitting down on a stump opposite her; "I'm the friend of all little children, and that's enough, is n't it?"

"Yes, sir," said May again, and after a second glance, returning to her dolls.

"And is this your family?" asked the doctor, taking up the lady with the pink parasol. "Quite ingenious, I declare."

"Yes, sir, if you please," said the monosyllabic little damsel, again.

"And how is it that you had rather play with them than be romping with the other children in the barn there?"

The child moved a little uncomfortably, and parted her lips as if she would repeat her stereotyped reply, but found it inapplicable, and said nothing; only the curls drooped a little lower as the head was bent above the doll, and, looking at her still intently, the doctor, with some surprise, thought he saw a bright drop like a tear fall on the green maple-leaf, and glitter there as morning-dew would glitter.

The doctor was a kind-hearted man in the main, but was not peculiarly sensitive to the sight of pain; he knew that pain was not altogether evil, but often a blessing in disguise. Sometimes he pleased himself, through long habit perhaps, with probing other people's emotions.

"I should think," said he, then, "it would be far pleasanter to hunt the slipper there on the threshing-floor than to sit here and dress dolls out of roots of grass."

"No," said the child, moving uneasily again, but looking up at last quite as if she had made up her mind to change the conversation in spite of her timidity, and drawing a quick breath while she added: "I play they are fairies, sir,—

the little green people that live down in the ground, and make the juices that feed the fruit and flowers, and come up by moonlight and dance in the shadow. I've never seen them, but Jack Spar has this many a time; and I leave them under the tree here every sunset, and they tell me what they did after the moon shone;—I play they do, you know. And I tell them I am sure they danced all night, they are so wilted and tired and faded out in the morning, you see. And once it rained in the night, and then I made believe that one of them had really been back in the ground, and got caught on the way up, because she had taken root again and was growing just as if nothing had happened —”

How long she would have run on with these disclosures the doctor did not know, but fortunately he saw through her innocent art as she prattled, and showed that he was not to be diverted, for, in truth, he fancied that he saw here a sore spot that needed medicining,—needed it badly, since it was so sore it might not be touched.

“But you can't play at fairies all the time,”

said he, interrupting her. "What else do you do up here in the hills, pray?"

"Oh, I learn my lessons," said she, carelessly, "and I can read and write and cipher now; and I hunt the eggs and find the nests the hens steal away down in the meadows when we don't want them to set. And mother says she couldn't do without me, though—" Here she paused, but added instantly: "And I know how to milk, and I find the flowers, the jacks-in-the-pulpit, and lady's-slipper, and the two little bells, and —"

"Ah," said the doctor, suddenly, and looking at the other children, "here are gay doings in the barn. Come, let us run along and join them. You will leave off growing, my little lass, sitting here so long."

"I had rather not," answered the troubled child, though at the same time casting a wistful glance toward the place, unless the doctor was mistaken in the direction of the glance.

"Why so?" said he, merrily. "They are having fine fun. See that rosy-cheeked chap — his head is as curly as a basket of grapes — that just kissed the pink-pinafores little woman. Ah, it's

worth while now to be a boy and play hunt-the-slipper. Come, run along with me, and get your share."

"I will go with you, sir. But Lawrence would n't kiss me, you know."

"Lawrence? That is his name? A handsome fellow."

"Yes, sir. Lawrence Bell."

"Not kiss you? And why not, pray?"

"Oh, because I look two ways for a Sunday, and have three lips for kissing!" cried out the child, vehemently, using the terms she had heard for her deformities, able to bear no more, and bursting into tears.

"My dear child," said the doctor, then, reaching forward, and drawing her up between his knees, "is that what troubles you?"

But the child's sobs choked her, and he waited a moment for her to quiet herself.

"Do you really care about these trifles?" he asked then, as her trouble subsided a little.

"About — about —"

"Your eyes and your lips?"

"Do I care?" she suddenly exclaimed, as

tragically as though she had worn the cothurnus for years, or had been born with it. "Do I care?" swallowing all her sobs. "Oh, I would die to-morrow, if I could be — like Agnes there — in the pink tier — only for to-day!"

"My dear little girl, there is no need of dying, for, as to being what you wish, there is nothing easier —"

"Oh, no, no, no! I was born so! Unless they — make me over again — it can't be! oh, it can't be!" And then fresh tears.

"And why do you care?" asked the doctor.

"Why?" surprise stopping the sobs, — to think any one could ask her such a thing! "Why? Because it makes a monster of me — Lawrence says so — like the little pink pig that had his ears on one side!" And she was crying like a shower again.

"Lawrence is n't so good-looking as I thought he was," said the doctor.

"Oh, yes, he is," said little May. "But it was when the little pig first came; and — somehow — it said itself — because it was true — that about being a monster!"

"And is that so very bad?"

"Oh, it is dreadful!" she cried, letting out all her soul to this inquisitor. "No one wants you; no one has you round; no one thinks it's any matter how you go; they put you last when sewing-circle comes; they say things that hurt! I don't believe God himself can like to look at you!"

"That is very wicked, May. God loves to look at all His creatures that are good."

"But a monster is not good! He wouldn't ever have pronounced a monster good the way he did Adam and Eve in Genesis."

"It is wrong that you should have been allowed to look on this thing so, my child. Can you imagine that a mere accident of the body —"

"Accident? But God made me —"

"Well, May," said the doctor then, seeing that it was impossible to treat so deeply rooted a trouble in the nature of this imaginative and sensitive child as if it were only a mere surface-weed, "I can prove to you that it is nothing but an accident, by undoing it."

“Un —”

“Undoing it. Just as you do a piece of poor sewing work. How should you like that? To have your eyes made straight, and your lip joined together. It can be done—and done so that one would never know you till you spoke.”

“Like Agnes?” exclaimed the child, catching her breath, and turning with the tears still coursing one another down her face. “Two great brown eyes looking right before her? And a mouth — Oh, it couldn’t be!”

“Two great brown eyes looking straight before you, and a mouth not quite like Agnes’s mouth, to be sure, because there will always be a scar there, but that will not matter much in comparison. And it will be a very good mouth.”

The child grew white as death, and fell to trembling as she had to crying just before. “Oh, it couldn’t be,” she gasped; “you’re only telling *me* a fairy-story now, I know; I know it couldn’t!” And the next moment the blood flushed up her face again with the wild glimpse of hope, bathing forehead and temple, and she sprang forward with her arms around the doc-

tor's neck, and her wet and burning face hidden under his ear. "Oh, perhaps you are one of the angels that came to visit Abraham in his tent," she whispered. "Oh, you must be one, you must, if you can make me over again!"

"No, indeed," said the doctor, laughing a little then, and seeing how real all her Sunday-school instructions were to the child. And taking her on his knee, he rested her head on his shoulder, smoothing her hair with his hand, and quieting her excitement as best he might. "No, indeed," said he, "only Dr. Derwent, of Derwentwater, whose business such things as these operations are. If I had the proper instruments with me, and could delay any longer from my sick people at home, I would do the work to-day. But I have n't. And so we must wait a little while, and see what can be done."

"Oh, I would n't mind that — waiting a little while — if it could really just be done at all," said the child, still shaken with the reactionary sobs that came every now and then in spite of her efforts.

"But there is something else you may mind, I ought to tell you. Are you afraid of pain?"

"Pain? I don't know — like that when they say the things that —"

"Hurt? No, the other sort of pain."

"Like the toothache and the growing-pain. Oh, no; I don't believe I am."

"That's good, then, so far. For there is pain to be borne when we are made over again. So I warn you to make up your mind for it. Not very bad pain, but still more than one bears easily."

"Oh, I will not mind it, sir, at all. I will hold just as still!"

"That is a good child. Now we'll keep this for a secret between us. And the next time the drovers, or any one else, go down from here to Derwentwater, do you make up a little bundle, and come along with them. They'll give you a seat. And here, on this card, is the number of the house where I live, so that you sha'n't forget, and if you show it to any one you will be led there at once, and there I will keep you for a few weeks, till everything is over, and all well

again, and send you back, when a good chance comes, so changed that your own mother would n't know you ! What do you think of that ? Now I must go. Good-by." And if Lawrence would n't kiss her, the doctor did, and then set her down on the old vine-covered stump, palpitating with pleasure. And when the flush of it was over, she sat there looking at the silver horns of the mountains melting away into the azure sky above, and across the paradise of green valleys at her feet, seeing all the beauty under a perfect aureole of glory, as if the world had been made over again so as to be ready for her when she came back remade from Derwentwater.

It seemed, in fact, from that hour, another world to the child, — the child no longer to be pitied, but full of a gladness hitherto unknown to her, full of the happy expectation of a miracle. Up in the gorge between the mountains the mist was rolling in a scarlet flame, sunset pouring bodily through the rift as she had never seen it do before ; down in the intervale there were rainbows lying in the grass, — it must be for the first time, she said to herself ; the birds were

singing their vespers with a music that her ear had never caught till now. As she still sat there on the stump, long after the other children had all gone to their homes, the sky seemed to open over her, one by one the stars came out, the soft evening wind came cool as the breath of great invisible blossoms; and wrought up to such a pitch of exaltation was the child, that now she half fancied, so strangely vast and beautiful did the advancing evening seem, that the end of all things was at hand, and that that change was the one meant by the angel in disguise who had called himself Dr. Derwent, of Derwentwater. But when the moon rose, and she saw the placid cattle all browsing quietly beneath her, and heard her mother call her from the door, she rose and went in, brought back to actual life, and persuaded that the doctor was no vision and that Derwentwater was no chimera.

It was the next morning that May was seen to be very busily employed with Jack Spar, the weather-beaten old sailor, who, having grown weary of ploughing the wave, had wandered up the hills, and taken to ploughing the sod under Mr.

Roberts's direction, and the anchors, crosses, stars and stripes tattooed upon whose breast and arms had been unfailing sources of delight and wonder to all the children far and near. Upon inquiry, it was found that Jack had concocted a preparation of the juice of herbs which he thought would answer all necessary purposes, and had indoctrinated little May into the art of decorating herself like a Fiji princess, and that May, who had stoutly refused to submit to the exercise at Jack's own longing hands, had very neatly and indelibly printed around her wrist the letters of her name, having, with quite remarkable foresight, left room for the addition of any short surname, such as Lawrence's surname was, for instance, in case it should ever be desirable to put one there.

"May!" cried her exasperated mother. "What do you mean, you naughty child? What was the need of making yourself more of a fright? Do you know that you have disfigured yourself for the rest of your days? But there, what odds does it make?" she cried, after her quick angry fashion, as she remembered the disfigure-

ment already existing in the child, and pushing her away from her. But with the next thought, as her way was, she had caught her back again impulsively, and was kissing the poor eyes and mouth, while still murmuring her reproaches over the wrist.

“Oh, I don’t mind that,” cried May, freeing herself and facing her mother, “I don’t mind that at all. But I’m going away to be made over again, and I marked my wrist so that you would be sure to know me, for I am, I am really, going to be made over, so that my own mother wouldn’t know me!” And the child danced away, singing some *tirra-lirra* like a bird, and as she had never been seen or heard to do since she came to the knowledge of her misfortunes; and her mother, altogether ignorant of the meaning of her words, watched in a new-born and superstitious fear, lest she might truly be going away to be made over into something not of this earth. Still the cross-eyed and hare-lipped little May was not of so heavenly a type of childhood that her mother had any need of fear in her regard; she was only a stout-hearted, eager little

body, who meant certainly to conquer her portion of the world to her own uses.

It was almost a month after his brief run into the mountains, and in the midst of all his other and multiplied cares, the doctor had nearly forgotten the little patient whom he had found there, when one bright morning a load of shingles stopped before his gate, and, after a long and laborious study of the card in her hand, and a comparison of it with the sign upon his doorpost, and with that upon the street-corner, a small, sun-bonneted lass clambered down the side of the great team, and pulled the doctor's bell, and, happening to open the door himself, he recognized and welcomed the sad and staid little mountain-maid, who looked, as she had informed him once, both ways for a Sunday. But sad she was no longer; her face, on the contrary, was radiant with expectant happiness, if not with beauty. She took it for granted that, of course, the doctor remembered all about her, and she forgot for a time to open her lips, while her glance ran up and down his office, her eye resting with particular attention upon a case of shin-

ing instruments that happened to be open there. But she never paused to look about her when he led her up to take a luncheon, did not give a glance at fresco or picture or mirror or statue, never noticed that her clumsy little shoe sank in the depth of the velvet pile upon the floor as it did in the moss on the mountain hillside at home, nor heeded the lace curtains like the film of hoar frost that every morning overlay the interval; and, with only a vague and general idea of a palace in her mind, she seated herself on the satin damask of a chair as carelessly as if it had been the old vine-covered stump where, when she first glanced up, she saw the doctor sitting on that eventful day. She had only thought and observation for a single thing; what were pictures and palaces to her just then? "If you could, as well as not, I should like to be made over, sir, to-day," she said at last. And in such a state of excitement was she, that the doctor thought it best, upon the whole, to make no more delay, and conducted her down to his office again, and called his wife, rather than his assistant, to be present. And it was impossible

for Dr. Derwent to give any stronger evidence of his interest in a case than that.

"Now," said he, when he had placed the child as he wished her to remain, "you must not be frightened if I bind you, for—"

"No, sir," she answered firmly; "there is no need. I will keep still without. I will!"

"But if you should start or move you might do an injury that never could be remedied. And it takes a great strength of will; I don't know how much you may have; and I am responsible to your parents, you know; so you had better let me secure—"

"No, no! I must, I must be loose, be free! Please don't, please. I will not stir—oh, certainly I will not stir!" she cried, half under her breath.

And at that the strong-minded, strong-souled lady who was the doctor's helpmeet flashed a glance toward her husband, signifying that she would take the child and hold her firmly.

"Very well," said the doctor. And the lady lifted the child on her lap, and laid her head upon her breast, and put her hand upon the

cheek, and held it there, and kissed her, and the doctor lifted his glittering little scissors, and in an instant it was over, and the eyes had been made straight, and were bandaged into the soothing dark.

"That is over!" said he, cheerily, while the child cried out with glad amazement. "Now, not any more to-day," and she was put away to sleep in a bed that seemed like a cloud to her, and was tended there, she half believed, by angels.

Then, after a few mornings, the doctor stole softly into the room, before the child had waked from her sweet night's sleep, with a vial and a sponge in his hand, and the ever-blessed ether swiftly drowsing all her sense, he cut and clipped, and sewed and plastered, and the lip was whole again. "Now, I expect you to obey me, mind! And you must not answer me, nor speak one word," said the doctor then, when presently she came to herself; and he slipped the bandage from her eyes, and left them bare in the soft dimness of the room that had just been obscured for them. "And now I will tell you, because you don't know," said he, "that there is nothing

more for you to do, except to take your gruel and soup through this tube, and get well as fast as you can. The eyes are done, and the lip is doing—you didn't know that—and as soon as the stitches heal, and the sight adjusts itself so that you can see as well at the new angle as you did at the old—so that you don't see two things where there is only one, I mean—why, then you will have been made over!" And not dreaming of disobeying him, the child only clasped her hands, and gazed up at him as if she were giving thanks and adoration to a living saint, with a look that would have recompensed any man like him for a thousand times the effort, and she sank into peaceful and delicious rest again with the look still like a glory on her face.

But at home in the mountains there was no such tranquillity as there was in the doctor's quiet house. May had been missed on the first day of her departure, which she had taken rather suddenly on hailing a team of shingles and finding it was destined for Derwentwater—May had been missed, and was nowhere to be

found. In vain the house and farm and field and grove were ransacked for her; May was lost, the place was in alarm, the great horn was sounded, and the neighbors summoned to hunt the hill. May was lost—she had always had a habit of wandering into the lonely spots, the other children teased her so; she might even now be fallen from some steep, and be lying among the jagged rocks at the foot of the precipices, or she might have stumbled across some wild beast's path, for there were both panthers and black bears in the hills, and have been rent asunder before she was so much as missed upon the farm. Every one thought of children at home, and trembled for her. Every one began to remember the poor thing's few gifts and graces. Every one forgot her naughty tempers and little imperfections. Sisters and brothers and playfellows, all together, recollected the cruel word or the taunting speech that had been so easy for them to utter and so piercing to her to hear. And it was only as Lawrence threw himself, in a flood of repentant tears, upon the ground, that he espied a bit of paper there, slipped from forgetful

old Jack Spar's pocket, — Jack having gone up the mountain to guide a traveller, — and the boy ran with it to May's mother in a joyful haste that made wings out of his feet, and was cried over for his pains till he felt too damp to be comfortable.

A little printed note the bit of paper was, daubed with one or two unavoidable blots which had been smeared off with the finger, but quite well-spelled, and meritoriously brief, assuring them that she hadn't told them for fear they would prevent it, but she had gone to be made over. And nowise displeased, on the whole, by the enforced holiday and subsequent junketing, the neighbors retired, after much feasting and a little subdued frolicking on the great threshing-floor; and with that note all whom it concerned were obliged to rest contented till the farmers who had carried their shingles down for sale in Derwentwater came back and reported the passenger their team had had.

May was safe then, the Robertses found; though still they had need to be anxious about her, so young a thing in a great, strange town. And by and by a letter from the doctor came to

reassure them,— the doctor not having allowed himself to be in a hurry with his letter, thinking that people who made a child's deformity such a burden to her, or who suffered it to be made so by others, would meet with no injury from the experience of a bit of suspense themselves. And as soon thereafter as he could accomplish it, which was not however under a month's time, Mr. Roberts reached the point of being about to start to fetch the little wanderer home. This had been a prodigious conception on his part, and a still more prodigious thing to carry into execution, for there was the mowing-meadow to attend to, and the hay to be spread again on the mountain-meadow, and there was the whitewashing, and Brindle and Cherry and Whiteface had their young calves, and then the horse was lame, and there were a pair of steers to buy, and the sheep to be sheared, and some money to be gotten from somewhere, and it might have taken infinitely less time and talk and worriment to create a world than it did to bring Mr. Roberts to this moment in which he had just taken his seat in the wagon and was

receiving the last of a universe of messages, which he would have been more than mortal to remember, and which he was painfully conscious were going in at one ear and out at the other, faring no better than the petitions to take care of himself, and to tie up his throat as soon as he came to salt water, and not to sit in a draught, and to remember his white pocket-handkerchief — when a peddler's cart, with its bells ringing gayly, drove up the road, stopped a minute, set down a little girl, and went on, and the little girl came capering in at the open gate, swinging her green sunbonnet, like a thing possessed, and climbed, without a word, into the wagon, seizing Mr. Roberts by the head and hugging him a hundred times, and stopping to look at him, and beginning again, and then crying out rapturously: "Oh, I don't believe you know me! The doctor said my own mother wouldn't know me, but he didn't say anything about my father! It's me! And if you don't believe it there's my name on my wrist!"

"As I live, it's our May!" cried her father. "May! Little May — here, stop a minute, let me see! Lovely!"

"Look at me!" she cried proudly, standing back as they all made a rush for the wagon. "Look at me — eyes straight before me — I looked at them in the glass myself. And they're two great brown beautiful eyes, the doctor said so. And my mouth — only two lips now —"

"Like a Cupid's bow!" said her father, snatching her up and kissing them.

But though May came by herself, Mr. Roberts went to Derwentwater all the same, and was so pleased with his visit that he has gone there once a year ever since; the fact that the doctor would take no money for his work making the visit a necessity, in order, as he tells his wife in explanation of the annual excursion with the big box of geese and turkeys, that they may pay their debt at last, if not by fair means, then by foul. And it was the doctor that told Mr. Roberts so good a girl as May ought to be sent to the best school in the world. And that is how she went to St. Marks and became one of Hester's friends, and although younger than Hester, yet so ambitious a scholar as sometimes to be Hester's despair.

THE FOURTH AT MARCIA
MEYER'S.

THE FOURTH AT MARCIA MEYER'S.

IT was lonely for Hester in the long vacation. She amused herself sewing on the gallery, watering her flowers, making sweetmeats over a spirit-lamp with poor Madame Cherdidi, who seldom went away either. And taken down to the kitchen by Miss Marks to toss up desserts and make tea-cakes, she was becoming quite a mistress of the useful arts.

But although Miss Marks sometimes went away with Hester on little journeys, just now Hester was alone with madame and the servants. And she grew tired of sewing, tired of rowing round the cove, tired of her books, almost tired of writing to her dear father far off in the South Seas — tired, anyway, of writing to Bella Brook, having her usual lovely summer at Mrs. Tenterden's. The only excitement of her days was walking to

the post-office for her letters. And she spent herself in longing to see her father, to put her hand in Miss Marks's, to have a good confidential hour with Marcia.

She was sitting on the high stone steps in the garden one morning, her guitar across her knee, a streamer of the yet-blossoming sweetbrier reaching down to garland her dark hair, a bird overhead bubbling forth a fearless song as if Hester were only a part of the garden wall. Very forlorn indeed a moment before, all at once she felt as if something had happened, — as if she had had a dream. For there stood Marcia in the path, the sun shining straight through her hazel eyes and on her leonine locks.

“Oh, you dear little graven image!” she cried. “You look as if you hadn't a friend in the world! You're awfully homesick and awfully lonesome, and wish you were tumbling with the brown babies in the surf of Pango Bay! Don't you, now?”

“Oh, Marcia!” cried Hester. “Is it really you?”

"And no less" said Marcia. "Come off your perch."

"Oh, Marcia, you said you would n't talk any more slang!"

"Slang? When you really are perched up there? Well, then, condescend, O dark daughter of the South Sea, to come down —"

But the dark daughter was already down, and had both her arms round Marcia's neck.

"What do you think?" cried Marcia, returning the rapturous embraces. "I always told you St. Marks was an angel! She and mamma have arranged that you're to spend next month with me at home."

"Oh, Marcia! Oh, Marcia dear!"

"Truly. And Miss Persis has come down with me to fetch you back. And to-morrow's the Fourth, you know. And papa has promised us a stack of fireworks — oh, lots of them! — blue-fire and flower-pots and set pieces, the flag, and Washington. I like the fireworks, but it's an awful day altogether, for John and Bert and Helen and Agnes are so patriotic it makes you wish there was n't any country."

"Was n't any country?"

"That was what I said, Miss Prim. But as you have so many —"

"I have only one country, Marcia! And I hate the other flags flying down there over the bay at home! And when I see ours, like a beautiful cloud in the sun, blowing so soft and slow over the water, I love it! Oh, I love it!"

"Great applause! Well, it isn't the Fourth yet, Mr. Speaker — I mean Miss. And you run along now, and throw some gowns into your trunk, and ask the madame to get in and tread them down, if you can't."

"Oh, Marcia," said Hester, laughing, "I really will be quick!"

"I don't suppose the most precise little packer under the sun can be quick. But the train goes back in two hours. And I've the greatest surprise for you! Now I'm going to take Miss Persis round the place, and introduce her to dear old Cherdidi, and let her see how much worse off she could be than teaching the little Meyers."

"Oh, she could n't!" said Hester, fervently.

"It is such engaging frankness that endears

Miss Hester Stanley to her schoolmates," said Marcia, kissing her. "The little Meyers don't mind."

"I know they don't," said Hester, laughing too.

"I mean, don't care. Come, hurry up, now you've hurried down."

And Hester hurried. Not so much for the sake of the Fourth and its fireworks, for to be with Marcia and Rafe was festival enough for her. And presently they were off. And at the end of the long railway ride there was Charlotte Risley, with all the Meyer children—at least almost all—in a hay-cart trimmed with green boughs. And when Hester saw them, although she knew that John was a dreadful example for Bert, and that Charlotte was sometimes a terror at school, she felt her heart warm, as if loneliness and vacancy had never been, and she had always had this dear little rabble about her.

"I'm so glad to see you, Hester," whispered Helen, slipping her hand in hers when they were on the hay in the bottom of the cart. "Rosy says you're her friend. But—"

"Oh, I am every one's friend," said Hester,

smiling, with her great dark eyes full of happiness.

"It is so good of you to come, Hester dear," Rosy leaned over to say.

"As if I could help it!" cried Hester, gleefully.

"John has got lots of torpedoes for you to fire, Hester," cried Agnes.

"And cannon-crackers," echoed Mabel.

"You need n't tell all you know," said John.

"And I've got some Roman candles for you, Hester," said Bert.

"So've I," said Tot.

"You can't fire a Roman candle," exclaimed Georgie.

"I can, too. I can fire anything."

"Now look out, or I'll fire you out of the cart!" cried John, dropping the pin-wheel he was fastening on the bush in the corner of the cart, to go off with a splutter.

"Oh, you *have* fired us out!" cried Marcia.
"Stop, James! Stop! Whoa, I say!"

And the children sprang out in a terror lest the hay should blaze.

"It was n't lighted," said John, loftily.

"John, you were forbidden to bring any of those things along," said Miss Persis. "You are not to be trusted with children in muslin frocks. There; now you may get in again. All but John. He may walk home."

"Then I will walk, too," said Bert.

"And I," said Georgie, not to be outdone by the bigger boys.

"So shall I," said Agnes, who was Georgie's guardian angel.

"Then I shall, too," said Mabel.

"Perhaps we all had better walk," said Marcia, after the way the Meyers had of hanging together in the face of the enemy.

"I sha'n't," said Charlotte Risley; "and I don't believe Hester will."

"It's a pity," said John, "if people can't do as they please on the Fourth of July!"

"It is n't the Fourth yet," said Rosy.

"The Fourth of July is Independence day, and John Adams said the way to keep it was with gunpowder and noise."

"I wish John Adams had never been born!" cried Marcia.

"Marcia," said Miss Persis, "I thought you were going to help me. Get into the cart immediately now — all but John."

And soon Mr. John was left trudging behind in the sun and dust, while silence and melancholy filled the hay-cart.

By the time they reached the old red house, and the baby Hester had toddled out to meet her little godmother Hester, who couldn't kiss her enough, good humor was restored. Mrs. Meyer asked Miss Persis if they were all there, and Mr. Meyer asked if she had not better count them, and Rafe came rolling himself along in his wheel-chair. That was the great surprise for Hester, since the last time she had seen him was up at Old Benbow, when he could help himself but very little, and had to be lifted from arm to arm. She could hardly think of a greater joy than this; for that Rafe should be well again was one of Hester's fondest dreams. But there was not much time for dreaming now.

"Charlotte is going to have a party," said Marcia. "It seems to me you ought to run home now, Charlotte dear. You're the hostess."

All the Meyer children are invited over to Charlotte's. And they have to go and wash their faces first, you know."

This was necessary. For Charlotte's aunt was so particular, you may remember, that she could not keep Charlotte herself at home, but had to send her away to school. From which you can imagine that in dreary vacations it was gayety for Charlotte to go over to the Meyers' and misery for the Meyers to go over to Charlotte's, where the great family portraits all along the hall half frightened them, where the shining floors were so slippery that they hardly kept their balance, and where they had to sit in a stiff row and hold their tea-plates carefully, and say "Yes, 'm" and "No, 'm"—for Miss Risley, who was thought to be old-fashioned, was very particular about the "'m." They usually had a reaction after one of Charlotte's tea-parties.

Meanwhile, with John's fatal facility for getting into mischief, he found companions on the way, and did not reach home till the children were trooping up the green from the party. And then, seeing his father—late about every-

thing—just opening and assorting the box of fireworks that the expressman had left a little while since on the front piazza, he slipped through the side door, that he might whip upstairs and be in bed before his absence should be noted. But those glad voices were too much for the little scamp. He would have his *feu de joie*, after all. He rushed for one of the serpent rockets from his store, and lighted and sent it writhing and hissing down the green to greet the home-comers. And crying out and skipping here and there, to his delight, to escape the twisting, flashing thing, they looked up and saw John's face in the light grinning like a gargoyle. But in a second that face was transfixed with horror. For there was a wild cry, a crack and crash and roar and splutter, and blinding flashes filled his eyes, and shrill screams rent his ears. He heard his father's voice and James's in the midst of the uproar that seemed to go on uninterruptedly, while the air was thick with the bursting of Roman candles, the whizzing of rockets going all ways at once, the whirring of wheels, the detonation of cannon-crackers,

dark with volumes of smoke through which went up flakes of flame, and foul with the smell of burned gunpowder. He realized in an instant that some spark from his wicked little serpent rocket had flashed into the heap of combustibles and reached a grain of gunpowder — and all was done. To-morrow night's fireworks had gone off in one big blaze and roar — and it was fortunate if that was all.

James had the hose attached to the hydrant, and was flooding the piazza. The explosions were over — although Mr. Meyer was having an explosion of his own. The fireworks were gone. All the pleasure the children and the neighbors had been expecting had vanished in three minutes. John felt as if there were no heart in his body, it sank so — not altogether from fear, but with real disappointment for the other children. "Oh, why can't I be good, like Rafe!" he sighed to himself. And he crept into bed, after his father had made him a visit, sore and sorry, and wished there had never been a pin-wheel made.

"There," said Marcia, when Hester was in the little bed opposite her own, "that's a very fair

beginning for our sort of Fourth of July. It does n't always go off quite so fine at the start. Mamma's been made ill, and John has had a whipping, and the little children are too nervous to sleep. Was n't Rafe beautiful, trying to quiet them when his own nerves were all on edge so? Now, if we can get forty winks before pandemonium sets in, we may have strength for to-morrow. I don't know what is going to become of John —"

But Hester was asleep while she was talking.

The town clocks had been answering one another with three strokes of their silver tongues when Hester was waked from the dream of an Indian war-whoop by sounds as blood-curdling — long blasts of fish-horns under the windows, and reports of revolvers. It was the boys — John's boys — who had come to call him out, it having been in the programme that he was to escape by way of the roof of the shed and meet them; and as he had not done so, they had come to demand his surrender from the superior powers.

"You speak to them, Hester," said Marcia.

"They all know me, and they won't mind a word I say. They'll only hoot the louder. And they'll kill mamma if they stay."

Hester slipped on her little dressing-gown and went to the open window. She felt very angry, and the late-rising moon shone full in her face, which was very pale, and kindled her great black eyes, so that she fairly struck the surprised urchins with a sort of awe.

"John's mother is very ill," she said. "If you don't want to be murderers, you will go away." And the poor little fellows, terrified at the thought, made a rush across the green, and were gone, to fire their guns and burn their crackers under other innocent windows.

But John had gone with them. Twice that night Hester had to repeat this performance with parcels of strange boys who came along. And she felt as if she had not been asleep at all when, just at the pink of dawn, the town bells began to ring, and somewhere, not very far off, they were giving a salute of great guns. The reports of the little guns and the crackling of crackers were all about them, and Hester found

herself waiting feverishly for the next one; and she fell off into troubled and disordered dreams, and was just talking with a fire-cracker that stood up and offered her a hand that was so warm she dropped it, and opened her eyes wider, to find the sun shining full across her face.

"It's Fourth of July!" said Marcia.

"Oh, you need n't tell me!" sighed Hester, stopping her ears with her hands at the noise of a roar from Bert because John would not give him the torpedoes and things he couldn't use himself — for John had come home wounded in both hands from his dark foray, and was in bed for the day at least.

"It's always the way," said Mr. Meyer, at breakfast. "If you anticipate a pleasure unlawfully, you spoil it. If John had let his pin-wheels alone yesterday, we should have had our fireworks."

"We did," said Georgie.

"We should have had them in quite a different manner, and without making your mother ill. Poor John! It's lucky it's his fingers; that'll

keep him at home, and be the means of saving his eyes, perhaps."

"And it's too bad," said Helen. "It's Hester's first Fourth of July."

"Her first gunpowder Fourth, you mean," said Marcia.

"It seems to me as if I had done nothing but smell smoke ever since last night," said Miss Persis.

"Why, how do they keep the Fourth down on your islands, Hester?"

"They don't keep it," said Marcia. "And if they did, they could n't do anything so silly and barbarous as we do, with our crackers and things. And we have to get them from Eastern barbarians, anyway."

"That's just because you're a girl!" said Bert.

"I've got lots of torpedoes," said Tot, defiantly, "and I mean to fire them."

"Well, you're only a boy," said Marcia, exasperatingly. "It does n't matter what a boy does till he drinks his milk without spilling it. For my part, I wish there was n't any such day!

The ice-cream at dinner's the only good thing about it. Seems to me, I'm smelling smoke all the time too, Miss Persis. I suppose it's the powder."

"Oh, Marcia!" cried Hester. "If there wasn't any Fourth of July, you'd be no better off, perhaps, than one of the island women down there swimming inside the reefs. You wouldn't know any more. You'd be worshipping an idol! Or you'd have your feet squeezed all out of shape, like the Chinese women, so that you could only get along the way a baby does." And she stopped to kiss the baby Hester, lest this should have hurt her feelings. "You'd be working in the fields, harnessed with a dog, maybe."

"Oh dear, dear, don't tell me any more. Take care, Mabel! There you go all over my clean gown!"

"Well, Hester," said Mr. Meyer, when it was quiet again, "if you kept the Fourth as you chose, what would you do? Another cup, Miss Persis, please."

"Oh, I don't know!" said Hester.

"Well, fancy."

"I think — yes — I would have the great guns off on the hill and echoing out at sea."

"And so would I!" came a chorus.

"And the bells, you know. They sound so glad."

"Oh, bells always do," said Marcia.

"But why more glad to-day than any other day?"

"Oh," said Hester, "because they say, 'Come here, come over here, all you poor people. Here are fields and food and friends.'"

"And they say, 'Be glad, you people who are here now, that you were born free and have the chance to make yourselves all that human beings may,' " said Miss Persis.

"And they say, 'Be good little boys, so that you can grow to be Presidents,' " cried Bert.

"They say, 'Down with Kings! down with thrones! We rang when they drove tyrants over the sea the way St. Patrick drove the snakes out of Ireland,' " said Marcia.

"They say, 'Fire your crackers! fire your crackers!'" cried Georgie, leaving his oatmeal, and running to the window to throw out the

torpedo that was in the way of burning a hole in his pocket.

"They don't say, 'Ask Miss Persis to excuse you first,'" said Marcia, witheringly. "Oh, I do hate the smell of gunpowder so!"

"I don't," said Bert. "And don't you forget it!"

"And after the bells, Hester?" asked Mr. Meyer.

"We might go up to Rafe's sitting-room, and have him read the Declaration; and then have you tell us about the day they signed it, sir. And we would sing the songs."

"We would sing this," cried Marcia, running into the next room, where there was a piano,—all the children joining her as she sang the "Flag Song" to the tune of "Yankee Doodle":—

Out upon the four winds blow,
Tell the world your story;
Thrice in heart's blood dipped before
They called your name Old Glory!
Stream, Old Glory, bear your stars
High among the seven;
Stream a watch-fire on the dark,
And make a sign in heaven!

Mighty harvests gild your plains,
 Mighty rivers bear them,
 Everywhere you fly you bid
 All the hungry share them;
 Blooms the wilderness for you,
 Plenty follows after,
 Underneath your shadow go
 Peace and love and laughter.

When from sky to sky you float,
 Far in wide savannas,
 Vast horizons lost in light
 Answer with hosannas.
 Symbol of unmeasured power,
 Blessed promise sealing,
 All your hills are hills of God,
 And all your founts are healing!

Still to those the wronged of earth
 Sanctuary render;
 For hope and home and heaven they see
 Within your sacred splendor!
 Stream, Old Glory, bear your stars
 High among the seven;
 Stream a watch-fire on the dark,
 And make a sign in heaven!

"And then," continued Hester, as they came back, "Miss Persis says she would have things in the town-hall, plays where the children have parts —"

"Or tableaux," said Miss Persis, "of scenes in history."

"And bands of music in the square, and all the people out walking," said Helen.

"And ice-cream free!" cried Bert.

"And lemonade!" cried Agnes.

"And a great dinner in a tent, or else all go off on some picnic or sail," said Marcia.

"And come back for fireworks at night," said Hester.

"And come back for fireworks at night," said Helen.

"And not a speck of gunpowder anywhere else," said Marcia.

"I would n't give a cent for such a Fourth as that!" cried Bert.

"We should n't have as good as that if we moved down to the Texas ranch where you want to go so, Bert," said his father.

"Oh, papa!" cried Marcia and Helen together.

"Oh, we may have to. Letters, Bridget?" as the maid brought in the mail. "One for you, Marcia; Miss Persis; here's a Round Table epistle for Lady Rosy; one of the Shut-Ins for Rafe. H'm, h'm, h'm — they'll keep. What were we saying?"

“Oh, papa!” cried Marcia, waving her letter. “It’s from Bella Brook! And Mrs. Tenterden is coming down the coast this afternoon in her little steam-yacht to take us all to see the fireworks along the shore this evening! She let Bella choose what to do, and Bella chose this. Oh, is n’t she a starter! We’re all invited. Too bad about John — though I don’t know. I wonder if I’ve a clean cambric? Helen, you must wear your white lawn —”

“On a yacht? I shall wear my dark blue flannel.”

“Well, your too, too solid flesh will melt then.”

This was joy enough for the day. The younger ones promised their best behavior and obedience to Marcia and Charlotte and Hester and their father; it was well understood that although John must stay at home with his mother and the baby and Miss Persis, it would take all of these to keep company manners among the little Meyers. “And they have n’t any other manners, you know,” said Marcia.

Hester proposed to stay at home and amuse John, but no one would listen to that, which

John thought very unfeeling. And after spending the morning watching for the little yacht which was not due till three or four in the afternoon, at last they saw it float in over the bar like a bubble. Then while they waited impatiently, Mrs. Tenterden had to come up with Bella to call on Miss Risley, whom she knew and go into ecstasies over the old house, and the old heirlooms, and the shining old furniture, and the grim old portraits that were Miss Risley's pride and care.

But at last they were off, the little *Swan* putting her nose down through this wave and skimming over the top of that, so that it was impossible for the Meyer children to restrain the manifestation of their delight, which was very agreeable to Mrs. Tenterden, although Charlotte and Marcia made her feel that they were dignified enough for all the rest. Then Hester, with her South Sea Island remembrances, was an object of interest to Mrs. Tenterden, who was always on the outlook for something novel. And so the time sped. And the afternoon changed into a sunset that the sea reflected and doubled,

till they seemed to be in the middle of a gorgeous shell. And then the purple twilight came, and the evening star trembled like a falling drop of gold and looked at her shadow in a long broken line of light upon the waves; and suddenly a yellow sun seemed to burst in the top of the sky and shed a shower of emerald and sapphire and ruby stars; and the dark sea repeated them. And then all the western sky was a shifting glory of long curving flights and ribbons of fire, and dances of shooting stars, and clusters of jewels paling to sparks, and all painted again in a tangle of lustres upon the sea, which had begun to be a little rough as the *Swan* headed down the shore for home. And Mrs. Tenterden said it was so charming to have all this without the noise and confusion of the land; and the young gentlemen were initiating Mr. Meyer into the mysteries of yachting, quite heedless that Mr. Meyer had sailed yachts before they were born; and the children were absorbed in the multitude of breaking splendors, and Hester and the other girls were in a hushed rapture of enjoyment. And so they came into

the bay — a great good fortune that no one was uncomfortable.

For the wind was coming up, and it was not such smooth sailing as before. As they neared the bar of the river, it was quite exciting sailing. It was very exciting sailing to Mr. Meyer, who stood up on the bow and watched sharply what Mrs. Tenterden had said was some set piece of fireworks on the horizon — a steady glare that grew larger and redder as they drew nearer, and did not burn out, as such fires do, but now and again streamed up with volumes of illumined smoke.

“It is some conflagration,” said Mrs. Tenterden then. “Do you suppose it is a meeting-house? A barn full of hay? Dear me, I hope it is not any one’s house and home! I am almost sure it is, though. Can you make it out, Mr. Meyer?” And she handed him the glass.

Mr. Meyer gave a long and steady look. He saw a mass of wallowing flame; he saw the lofty elm-trees illuminated till they looked like fountains of fiery sparks; and it seemed to him that if the *Swan* did not go faster he should have to swim ashore himself. For the tide was running

strongly over the bar, and the wind met it with a great cross-sea, and the little *Swan*, on the top of a wave, made a plunge, and dipped her beak into a sea that ran to swamp her, and rose and shook as if she were tossing off the foam, and rolled from side to side, and diving, with her screw out of the water, wriggled like a worm on a pin, as Marcia said; and up she rose, and down she plunged, and slipped over into still water. And in five minutes more she had left her guests ashore, and was on her way back between the harbor lights.

There was a great turmoil at the landing. Fire-bells were still ringing, and cries and shouts still rending the air. But Miss Risley was on the spot. "Oh, Mr. Meyer!" she cried. "They're all over at my house! And all in bed! Every one! And most of the furniture is saved! It was a spark from those fireworks last night that caught under the piazza and crept along the sills, smouldering all day. Miss Persis kept saying she smelt smoke. But they're all safe," she said, with the last remnant of breath. "No one is hurt at all."

"Thank God for that!" said Mr. Meyer.

"And you must all stay with me," said Miss Risley, rising to heights of sacrifice, "till you can rebuild the place."

"You can't rebuild a homestead," said Mr. Meyer. "You are very good, Miss Risley. We shall be glad to stay till we find some spot for the rest of the warm weather. But this settles it. We shall go to Texas; and you will have to come down to the ranch for a return of your hospitality," he said; while Marcia rushed on like a tempest to find her mother and John and the baby, leaving Hester and Rafe to quiet the sobs of the rest as they clustered, half bewildered, round Rafe's chair.

The little Meyers slept late the next morning; and dressing them in what came first, and impressing the fact that Miss Risley's goodness must be met with goodness, Marcia sent them all over to play in the ruins.

"You see, it's just as I say, Hester," said she. "It's no better than a Gunpowder Plot the way we keep Fourth of July. Sometimes we burn up a city, and sometimes only a house. Oh, the

dear old house!" cried Marcia, the tears running over her face. "You'll never come to us another Fourth of July, Hester."

"Not in the same dear old house, Marcia," said Hester. "But it is n't the house, you know; it's the people in the house. And I should love you and come to see you just the same if you lived in a tent."

"Oh, Hester! That's just the greatest! What do you think? Of all the strange things in this strange world! Papa has hired a couple of big tents, and he's going to pitch them over in the garden, and we're going to live in them there till he looks about him, and makes up his mind what he really will do. Poor papa!"

"Oh, Marcia, how lovely! how really lovely! And do you believe I can stay, too? Are you sure I won't be in the way? It will be just one long picnic!" said Hester.

"Well, I suppose it will be," said Marcia. "Gypsy fires and all that. It's well to have something good, anyway, out of our Fourth. There come Charlotte, and Rafe with the baby

in his chair. I ought to be taking care of that child."

"I ought to be," said Hester, "when I'm her fairy godmother."

"They're going to set the stakes for the tents," cried Rafe. "And the baby is going to strike the first blow."

"Oh!" said Charlotte. "Just think of me living in that house with all those portraits, and you living in a tent all summer! You *must* ask me to visit you!"

"Angels have always visited people who live in tents," said Rafe.

LITTLE ROSALIE.

LITTLE ROSALIE.

HESTER had more opportunity for visiting than many of the girls at Waterways; for her home being on the other side of the world, she could not easily return there either in the long or short vacations; and several of Miss Marks's friends were very glad to have her whenever she could come to them.

After being at Old Benbow, and being received with favor by Grandmother Maurice, she sometimes went up to town for a holiday with Marnie, welcomed by the children with hugs and with treats, and introduced by them to all their objects of pleasure. And in the winter-time in town the object that gave them most pleasure was Little Rosalie.

It was a young "play-acting girl," as the children's nurse called her. Her name, on the

advertising bills posted up at every street corner, was "LITTLE ROSALIE;" and the great delight of the children was to be allowed to go to a matinée on a Saturday when they could hear and see her. It made no difference to them who else was on the stage. Irving himself or Booth, Patti or Nilsson, might have figured there; to the children they would have been merely as aids to "Little Rosalie." There was no play to speak of till she appeared; or if there were, it was only because it led up to her appearance; and when she vanished, it was all flat and unprofitable till she came on again.

When they went home, they used to talk over the afternoon's experience untiringly, by the nursery firelight and even after they were in their beds. But the subject of their talk was never the mystery and excitement of the play, the charm of the scenery with its lovely landscapes and splendid drawing-rooms, the beauty of the leading lady, the sweetness of the music, the drollery of clown or comic man — it was always and only Little Rosalie. And Hester was presently as much interested as any one of the rest.

Sometimes Little Rosalie was one character in the play, and sometimes she was another. Once she was a moonlight fairy, in a little white silk gown whose long folds fell about her feet; her soft hair was loose on her shoulders, a star gleamed on her forehead, and another star tipped the lily's stem she held for a wand; with her eyes uplifted, and a white light on her face, she sang, and the children thought a little angel from heaven would sing and look in just that way. And then a rosy light shone on her and made her lovely and luminous; again this changed to a pale-blue light, while a mist gathered about her and she seemed to grow dimmer and dimmer, singing more and more faintly, and now — she was gone! The children knew nothing of the way in which folds of lace, drawn one after another between her and themselves, had caused her to disappear; all seemed to be due to Rosalie's own powers and perfections. And when, in another scene, she came dancing on in short, gauzy skirts, with two butterfly-wings of peacock-feathers upon her shoulders, and, springing upon a cloud, went sailing up out of sight

as the play ended with soft music, they always found it difficult thoroughly to believe that she was not a fairy indeed; and the next time they were taken to see her, they felt some misgivings as to whether she really would be there. And when she did appear, but as a poor little street-girl selling trifles from her basket, then it seemed as if she had been a poor little street-girl all her life, and as if her fairy existence were all a dream of their own.

What they would have said at first, if they could have known that Little Rosalie acted the part of a street-girl selling trifles for her mother and the rest at home in so lifelike a manner because Rosalie was in truth and reality working for her own mother and the others at home, I do not know. They never thought of her as living a life apart from that at the theatre. It never occurred to them to ask what became of her in the times when she was not tripping and dancing hither and thither in the midst of colored lights and enchantments; whether she was packed up and put away with the stage properties, or whether she lived perpetually in

the light and atmosphere in which they saw her play her mimic part. But there was no lady in all the land, nor in all the story-books, nor in all dear Marnie's histories, nor in all the tales that Aunt Nan had to tell, who was one tithe as interesting to them as Little Rosalie. And when they put a penny aside for their church money and their missionary money, they were very apt to put two pennies aside for the ticket that was to be an "open sesame" to Little Rosalie's domain; and even their own savings were not enough, but had to be helped out by Uncle John or Aunt Nan,—for there were so many of them that they usually had found it best when they went to the theatre to take a box, and that required quite a sum of money. And they always had the indulgence when Hester came; and it was the only thing that reconciled them to her going away—because then she could come again!

But it was not so very often, after all, that this indulgence was permitted them. Not half a dozen times a year were they allowed so great a treat; but once for themselves and with their

own money ; and once because it was Christmas week ; and once because some lady came with a young daughter of her own to be entertained ; and once when their cousins came up from the country, — and oh, how they wished they had cousins to come up from the country every week !

“No,” said mamma. “When you have been having hard lessons, — when Marnie has been struggling with her ‘compound proportion’ —”

“‘The rule of three perplexes me, and fractions drive me mad,’” sang Larry, half under his breath.

“— and Larry laboring over his Natural Philosophy, and Rosy has mastered her difficulties, and Joe and all have been doing their best, — *then* I think an excursion into Fairyland does you no harm, and I let you go and see Little Rosalie. But if you went as often as you wish to go, why, it would be like a dinner that is all dessert ! And that, you know, would never do.”

“I suppose not, mamma,” said Marnie, a little sorrowfully.

“Going to see Little Rosalie,” said Larry,

"is n't like going to the theatre generally. It's — "

"It's just because we love her so," said Marnie.

"And wish to see her," added Joe. .

"And I really think she knows us now," said Marnie. "I should have liked so much to throw her my bunch of violets, if I had dared, the very last time we were there."

"Why did n't you tell me?" said Larry. "*I'd* have thrown them for you."

"Because I knew you would, I suppose," answered Marnie. "And I did n't know whether it would do, you know."

"That's just like a girl!" said Larry.

"You don't expect me to be like anything else, do you?" said Marnie, with her sweet roguish smile.

"Mamma," said little Kate, returning to the subject, "is she weally alive, or do they only wind her up and make her go?"

"I don't believe she's alive just as we are," said Marnie. "She has those lovely wings, you know."

"She does n't have them all the time," said

Joe. "She does n't have them when she's kneeling by her dying mother, or selling the things in the street."

"Oh, *then*," said Rosy, "she's *acting*! And the wings are probably folded up under her ragged gown."

"But I should think they'd show just a little bit."

"Well, they don't. Oh, should n't you like to know her, Marnie, and talk with her once!"

But Marnie was busy just then in comforting little Kate, who had hit her head against some corner.

"The idea!" said Grandmother Maurice, who was there for two or three days. "I should certainly be afraid, Margaret, that, being so fascinated by her, they might some time become acquainted with this child-actor."

"And what if they should?" said their mother. "I am acquainted with her."

"You, mamma, you?" came a chorus. "Oh, mamma, you can't mean so!—how did it happen?—tell us all about it, please!"

"Is she a *truly* person?" asked little Kate.

"Does she live in the theatre?" asked Joe.

"Has she a mother, or anybody?" asked Marnie.

"Yes, she is a 'truly' person," answered their mother. "She lives on a street around the corner a little way from the theatre. She has a mother, a very sick mother, and an old grandmother, and a number of brothers and sisters. And she takes care of all of them."

"Takes care?" asked Marnie, drawing her puzzled brows together.

"Yes, actually takes care. In the first place, there is no money for the family but that which she herself earns. Out of her salary she pays the rent of their rooms, buys their coal, and all their food, their clothes, their medicines, and everything else they have. Of course, they do not have a great deal. And, more than that, this lovely little fairy creature, who seems to you a being of wings and colors, of light, music, and grace, of dancing, and of miraculous fairy-powers, rises in the morning, and makes the fire, and dresses the children, — the two youngest are

twins, — and they all are younger than she herself, too young yet to do any work worth mentioning. Then she prepares the breakfast, and makes her mother comfortable, helps her poor old grandmother, and arranges the rooms. Some of the smaller ones help her in that. And then she goes to rehearsal; that is, to the empty theatre, where they practise portions of the evening work, with nobody to look on or applaud."

"Oh, how I should like to be there!" cried Marnie. "I mean, if all the rest of us could be."

"It would n't attract you in the least," said Grandmother Maurice. "All that part of the house where the audience sits is dark; black cambric covers the seats, and keeps the dust from the velvet and gilding; and on the stage the scenes are not set, so you see only odd pieces of painted boards and ropes and pulleys; while carpenters and their men are running about without their coats. The players are in their every-day clothes, and rattle over their parts, going through only the necessary motions, or trying certain of the mechanical effects, — the things that are done by machinery, you know, —

such as riding away on clouds, or sailing upon a river, and so on. Oh, they are not at all interesting,—rehearsals,” said grandmother. “You make the thing altogether too attractive, Margaret.”

“Well, then, rehearsal over,” resumed their mother, with a smile, “our Little Rosalie goes to market, and comes home, gets dinner, and clears it away. And if she has a new part to learn, she sits down to study it; and the study is severe, for she has to learn by heart every word she is to say, every gesture she is to make, and every step she is to take. She has to practise her dances, sometimes for hours, and her songs, too. Oh, she works every day for many hours harder than you ever worked any hour in your lives. She has also to make and mend for the others, although the old grandmother gives some little help; and, when night comes, the twins and the three other children put themselves to bed, while off she goes with her basket of costumes on her arm. Nobody thinks of troubling her, for all the policemen and people about there know her and are on the lookout to see her safely on her way.

“When the play is over, she comes out of the stage-door into the night. It is often snowy and slippery or dark and muddy from a heavy rain, with not a star to be seen, the long reflections of the street lamps shining on the wet pavements. Sometimes she has a little supper with her grandmother before she creeps into bed, tired out; but often she goes to bed hungry.

“I suppose she may be able to play her fairy and childish parts for some years yet; for poor food and not enough of it, late hours and little sleep, and her hard life, altogether, will perhaps have the effect of making her grow very slowly, and it is probable she will always be rather undersized. But her beautiful voice ought to be carefully trained.”

“Oh, mamma!” cried Marnie, with tears in her sweet eyes, “I think it is so cruel. If she could only come and live with us!”

“And what would become then of her mother and grandmother, of her sisters and brothers? They have nobody but Rosalie to do anything for them, and would have to go to the almshouse or die of starvation if it were not for her earnings.”

"Oh, I forgot!"

"Papa could take care of them!" exclaimed Joe.

"Do you think papa could take care of another family of eight persons, and educate and bring up the younger ones —"

"I suppose you think he is made of gold!" cried Larry.

"There are people worse off than these," resumed mamma; "people who have n't even any Rosalie to earn money for them. And such people need all the time and money that papa and I have to spare."

"But it all seems so strange," said Marnie, "that I can't get quite used to it. She lives around the corner there, in some rooms, and cooks and sweeps and sews, and has a mother and brothers and sisters, as we do?"

"Yes; and I suppose her mother's heart aches to have poor Little Rosalie doing so much; no doubt she often grieves over it. I've no doubt, too, that she may feel a sort of terror, dreading what would become of the other children if anything happened to Rosalie. So, too, all the

children look upon Rosalie as the one who gives them everything they have; as their protector — in short, their guardian-angel. When you saw her in that singing-play hovering over the children asleep in the wood, with the great rosy wings arching up above her head and pointing down below her feet, you didn't dream that she really was a guardian-angel to so many, — did you?"

"Oh, mamma," cried Marnie, with tears in her eyes, "and I am of no use at all!" and she could n't see a word of Rosy's exercise, which she had been looking over for her sister when the talk began, because of those tears.

"I think," said Hester, timidly, "I don't like it quite so well to know about her really, though. Larry said once that when the play was over she was changed into a footlight and somebody turned her off, and when it was lighted again, she stepped out. But —"

"Oh, but Marnie said that could n't be," cried Larry, — "it was the night Joe cut his hand and Marnie made him forget the pain by talking about Rosalie, — and she said that, perhaps, when the

lights were put out, Rosalie went down through one of the trap-doors and into a narrow passage that ran far away under all the city and was lighted by a moon at the very farthest end,—a moon setting in the sea, for the passage comes out in a cave on the sea-coast; and that the cave was all lined, on top and sides, with bell-tones; and every time that the light of the little breaking waves glanced up and struck them, all the bell-tones were set ringing, and it was Little Rosalie's work to polish off the bell-tones and tune them and make them ring just right, and when this was done those tones were what made all the music in the world."

"I didn't believe it," said Joe. "How do her bell-tones make mamma's voice sing, I'd like to know?"

"How does the sunlight make this fire shine?" asked Larry, loftily.

"Go along with your conundrums! You think, just because you're in Philosophy, that nobody else knows anything!"

"I said 'perhaps,' Joe," said Marnie, gently. "It was all only 'maybe,' you know."

"Well, I'm sure Rosalie makes just as much music in the world in the way she does as she could in that way," said Larry.

"Can't we go and see her at her real home, mamma, or have her come to see us?" asked Marnie, wistfully.

"There it is, Margaret! Just as I told you!" said Grandmother Maurice.

"I am afraid it would do her no good, my dear. It is no kindness to make her discontented with her own home. And ours is very different."

"At any rate," said Rosy, "you said we might go to see her when Hester came."

"So I did, if you had money enough between you for a box."

"It is ten dollars for a box," exclaimed grandmother.

"But there are so many of us that it is cheaper to have a box, and in some respects it is more convenient."

"I don't like a box half so well," said Joe. "There's always somebody that doesn't see anything."

"Well, it is never *you*, Joe!" said grandmother.

Joe colored up so that it was certain he would have answered back and spoiled everything, if Hester's hand had not stolen gently to his arm; still he must say something sharp.

"Rosy does n't care," he remarked, "if I do have the best seat for seeing, so long as she's in the front of the box where people can see her long curls."

"Oh, I should think you'd be ashamed, Joe!" cried Rosy. "I never wished anybody but Rosalie to see them."

"And we all wish Rosalie to like us," said Marnie.

"Rosalie's too busy for that sort of thing!" said Larry, with great contempt.

"I don't know that she is," said Marnie. "Once — I — I never told anybody — but once, when she was so very near our box, you know, I really did throw her a little lace bag full of chocolates, — those lovely chocolates that Uncle John gives us. And she caught it, and looked over and laughed, and actually slipped one into her mouth —"

"Then they weally do eat chocolates in Fairy-

land," murmured little Kate, as she climbed into Marnie's lap, for as yet she had by no means settled everything clearly in her head.

"Well," said Larry, presently, looking up from the heavy calculations that he had been making with a pencil on his wristbands, "we can't go yet,—unless grandmother 'chips in'—" And to everybody's amazement grandmother did "chip in" a bright two-dollar-and-a-half gold piece on the spot.

"That squares it!" said Larry. "We *could* have borrowed some of our church-money, and let that wait, but Marnie said it wouldn't do. Now—nurse and grandmother and mamma are three, and all the rest of us are—how many? No matter; we can all squeeze in, I guess. And I say, Marnie," and here Larry's voice softened to a whisper, "have you any more of the chocolates?"

That night, in their little beds in the big bedroom, most of the children, as usual, could hardly close their eyes for joy over the expected outing.

"Say, Marnie, are you asleep?" whispered Hester.

"Of course not," answered Marnie. "How do you suppose I can sleep, when I'm going over in my mind the music that Rosalie's going to sing and dance to, next Saturday?"

"Oh, what is it like, Marnie?"

"Yes, what is it like, Marnie?"

"Well, it begins like a wind in the woods,— every little leaf whispers like a flute, and then they all bend with the wind that comes sighing along, and that wind is an oboe; you know the oboe. And it goes sighing along out of sight. And far, far, far off, the violins are humming, all in a confusion, and the sound of them grows slower and more distinct, and you hear it, and it is rain. And then come long, heavy chords from the violoncellos, that mean clouds. And, suddenly, the tone of a great, strong violin goes spurting into the rain and cloud, and comes leaping and dancing down, and that is the brook; and then the brass things — the horns, you know, and the cymbals and those — make everything all sunshine, and the violins soften down, and you hear harp-tones, — oh, in such a soft, bright, lovely air! And that is Rosalie, the Spirit of the

Brook, coming on. And she is all in palest folds of gauze, palest blue and palest green, like great sheets of ice; she is sparkling with jewels, and her eyes and smile sparkle, too, and — oh, Hester, how beautiful it is for anybody to do all the good that Rosalie does in the world! Oh, if I could only be of use to people —”

“Oh, you are, Marnie dear, you are of the greatest use to me! I don't know what I should do without you!” exclaimed her little bed-fellow, clasping Marnie in her arms, and able to speak her heart fully because it was dark. “You see to my work, and you make up our quarrels, and you get your mamma to let us do things, and — and —”

“But, you see, if I died, — to-morrow, say, — you would all get along as well without me in a little while. I'm not really *necessary* to anybody. And she is really necessary just to keep ever so many people alive, and to bring them up and help them on in the world. And then, think to how many people she gives pleasure; and how many children just count the days, the way we do, before they go to see ‘Little Rosalie.’

How perfectly lovely it must be to give people pleasure, like that! Oh, if I could but be as useful in the world as she is — ”

And there Marnie stopped her confidences, for the faintly murmured assents showed that Hester would soon be sound asleep in spite of herself.

What a merry party it was, that set out for the “Old Prospero” that frosty Saturday afternoon! Something detained the mother at home; but Aunt Nan went in her place, and there were nurse and Grandmother Maurice and — The door-keeper laughed to see the rest of them; he did n't pretend to count them, and so why should I? It is no affair of anybody but the door-keeper, how many went into that box; nor that nurse had a luncheon for little Kate; nor was it even *his* affair that Larry and Joe did a good deal of pushing and shoving before finding the seats they wished; nor that Joe hung over the red velvet cushion in front, to see whether, if he fell, his head would alight on the bass-drum or the snare-drum in the orchestra, while grandmother clutched at his heels and very nearly made him

fall; nor that Marnie, as usual, was crowded into the very front corner next the stage, where, if Joe had fallen, it would not have hurt him; and where she could see less of the play than any of the others; where, had she chosen, she could have climbed over and at a single step have mingled in the scene; and where she could see so much of the ropes, and ladders, and coils of hose, and pieces of scenery, and everything going on in the wings, that it destroyed a good part of the illusion.

Marnie laughed, though, — she couldn't help it, — when Aunt Nan, after settling herself, took a phial of water from her muff.

“There!” said Aunt Nan. “I never go to the theatre without it. For you know if there should be a fire, and one were in danger of suffocating from the smoke, only let the handkerchief be wet in cold water and held over the mouth and nose, and one can breathe through that and keep alive a great while longer —”

“Nonsense, Nan!” said grandmother. “What do you want to frighten the children for? As if there were one atom of danger in such a well-

regulated place as this, with all these doors, and with firemen behind the scenes !”

“There is always danger, Mrs. Maurice, in the best of them,” said Aunt Nan, severely. “And even if the firemen should put out the fire, the fright, the crazy panic, that would be caused, would do as much harm as the fire ; for there would be a rush and a jam, and people would be thrown down and trodden and squeezed and suffocated to death. I was in a theatre once,” she continued, as the children listened open-mouthed, “when there was an alarm of fire, and everybody started up, and some screamed, and some fainted, and great heavy men in the front rows went walking right over the backs of the seats — oh, we got out alive ! But I declare I don’t see how ! There are the Clingstone children, — little dears, — do you see them, Marnie ?”

But as Marnie heard Aunt Nan, her eyes grew bigger and bigger, — far too big to see anything so near as the Clingstone children ; so big that she could see only the daily danger in which Little Rosalie lived ; and the terrible thought of it all prevented any pleasure she might have

taken in the strange and lovely opening scenes. But after a while, and when Little Rosalie had come on the scene, Marnie forgot that trouble in her present delight.

"Ain't you glad you comed, Marnie?" whispered little Kate; and, taking Marnie's answer for granted, added, with a sigh of contentment, "So'm I!"

But Marnie did not hear her — she was so rapt in seeing a huge blossom open and let Rosalie out, to the sound of soft music, all her fays following from other unfolding flowers. She leaned far from the box in her forgetful gazing; and soon it seemed as though Rosalie, whirling very near in her pirouette, gave them a smile of recognition, and then none of the children had either eyes or thoughts for anything but this floating, flashing sylph, swift as a flame and beautiful as a flower.

"Oh, I wish Lucia was here!" thought Marnie.

At that moment a child down in the audience cried about something, and diverted from the stage, for half a thought, the glances of the occupants of the boxes, and of the rest of the audience as well,—the glances of all but Marnie. In that

brief moment her eye beheld a dreadful sight seen by but one other person in front of the stage.

Some one on the stage, however, had seen it had uttered something, not in the part, to the one nearest, and the next instant down rolled the drop-scene and hid the stage from view.

But not a moment too soon. For a spark had shot out and fallen on some inflammable substance, and one little flame had sprung up and another had followed it, racing and chasing upwards till a hundred tiny tongues of fire, like little demons, were flying up the inner drapery and far aloft. At the same instant some one in the back of the audience shouted, "Fire!"

It is a terrible sound in a crowded building. It makes the heart stop beating for a second. It made Aunt Nan's heart stop beating for that second, and then she began to cry in spite of grandmother's calm voice, and to huddle the children together to rush for the door. But it came upon Marnie in that moment that if everybody rushed to the door at once, nobody could get there. Those in front, she saw at once, would be crowded on and knocked down by

others piling upon them, and all buried under one another, stifled and killed,—so that fire itself could do no more. As the thought, lightning-swift, ran through her mind, she saw people rising excitedly in the front, and she knew there would be a panic the next moment, a rush, a jam, and fearful trouble. Oh, why was there nobody to prevent it? If papa were but there! Oh, thank Heaven, thank Heaven, he was not,—if there was no escape! Could nobody hinder? If she herself were only of some use! And these countless children here, whose mothers would be broken-hearted; and the mothers who would never see their homes again,—homes that would be desolate! This was all realized in two breaths. And in a third breath the drop-scene was pulled aside a trifle, some of the orchestra took up the music that had stopped for only a few beats, and out bounded Little Rosalie with her long scarf and basket, spinning and pirouetting half-way across the stage, and pausing in the middle of the prettiest attitude of the “Great Bonbon Act,” while out of the charming basket on her arm she caught and whirled hundreds of bonbons as far

as her hand could throw them among the babies in the audience. It was done in far less time than it takes me to tell of it. But as one of these very bonbons fell into the box, the thought rushed into Marnie's mind that the stage people were afraid of the panic and the crush, and so had sent Little Rosalie out with the bonbons, to dance as if nothing were the matter, hoping thus to distract the attention of at least enough of the audience to prevent the sudden attempt of so many to get out at once,—whereby a number would certainly be killed in the panic,—by making them think it must be a false alarm if the play could still go on and this child dance so composedly, and that in the mean time they themselves were trying to put out the fire.

For Marnie herself had seen the fire. And she knew it was actually in there, spurting and spouting and climbing higher and higher; and she could hear, from where she was, the breathless movements of those behind the curtain who were trying to smother it.

But something else rushed over Marnie, too,—for thought is wondrous quick and full. It

was that if Little Rosalie stayed there another moment she would herself be burned alive, and then what would become of the mother and the grandmother and the twins, and all the rest who had nobody but Rosalie in the whole wide world ! And before Marnie fairly knew what she was doing, and while poor Aunt Nan was still clucking and calling to the family, she sprang up and from the box, — it was but a single step, — and had run across the stage, before all the bewildered people, and had clasped Little Rosalie, crying quickly and softly, as she dropped her arms, “Oh, run, run, Little Rosalie, run ! Save yourself ! For I really saw the fire ! And,” as Rosalie did not run, “what will they do at home without you, if you are killed here ? And there are so many of us at home that nobody will miss me very much ! I will stay instead of you !”

Poor Marnie ! As if her staying would have been of the least use ! But she never thought of that. She only thought that if some child must stay there it would better be she than Rosalie. And even while she pleaded, up went the great drop-scene, rolling to the top, and out flocked all

the players of the scene, and a few of the orchestra, who had not at first had courage to remain, slipped back and swelled the music; and a motley throng surrounded Rosalie and Marnie, and whirled them back and out of sight, and from the front there came a perfect storm of clapping hands that was almost terrific. And then a group of the strangest looking people were caressing Marnie, and Little Rosalie herself was hanging on her neck one moment, and somebody took her by the hand,—she was now pretty thoroughly frightened, and had a vague idea that she was to be carried out to the “sea-cave,” after all,—and led her round by some back way to the box again. Here Aunt Nan was just resuming her seat and smoothing her ruffled feathers, but was still quite determined to go out and take the children with her, as soon as this could be done without attracting too much attention. The children were quite as determined not to go; and, indeed, their pleadings finally carried the day.

But that night Marnie’s father came into the room where she lay in her little bed much too

excited to sleep. "It was one of the bravest things I ever heard of, — Little Rosalie's act," said he. "Such a child as that must not be wasted. And a subscription is to be taken up that will bring a sufficient sum to complete her education in whatever way is thought best."

"Oh, you don't mean so, papa!" came a chorus from all the beds. "Oh, how glad I am! And to take care of all her folks at home, too, papa!"

"But as for you, my little darling," continued her father to Marnie, "how could you possibly think you were of so little use at home as to be willing to break our hearts by risking the loss of your life? What if I had come home to-night and found no Marnie to meet me?" And Marnie started up and threw her arms about her father, touched to the heart by her sudden feeling of what his grief might have been. "I want you never to forget, little daughter," he went on in a husky voice, "that you are of great and important use in the family. Does not your mother rely on you as her first aid? Are you not my little comforter? How are all these

children to grow up without the example and the care of their eldest sister? Our duties all begin at home. Heroic actions are great and admirable, but there are other actions just as admirable. Among these are the daily acts of duty done, with which you make life pleasant and easy for your mother and me, for Larry, for little Kate, and for all of us. When I remember that I never saw my Marnie out of temper in my life —

“Nor heard her speak rudely to any one,” interrupted the listening Hester.

“Nor knew of her telling anything but the truth,” cried Larry from the other room.

“Nor heard her say ‘I can’t,’ when you ask her to tie your ribbons, or to do your sum, or to find your needle,” added Rosy.

“Nor knew her to do anything but to try to make everybody about her happy, and keep her own sweet soul white in the eyes of heaven,” continued her father. “When I remember this of Marnie, I think all this daily service is of as much worth as the one heroic deed that risks life to save the lives of others.”

"I *don't*," said Joe. "I think it's splendid to save folks' lives. I'm not going to do anything else, when I grow up. Are you, Larry? Only, I wish I'd thought before Marnie did, and had begun by trying to save Little Rosalie!"

AT OLD BENBOW.

AT OLD BENBOW.

THE winter had set in with such a soft snow-fall, and Old Benbow looked so fine with the ermine mantling his great forests, and there was such a crystal crispness of frozen surface, that Grandmother Maurice felt that she must have the children up in the hills for Christmas.

“You shall have a sleigh-ride on the lake,” she wrote, “and Larry shall build a snow statue, if he can. And you shall toast chestnuts, and hear strange stories of the mountain doings. And what you will like better, perhaps — yes, you shall have a toboggan slide; there won’t be such another in the country! But you shall have no Christmas presents. We will see if it is n’t possible to keep Christmas joyously without degrading it by mercenary and self-seeking gifts.”

It did seem a shame, grandmother argued to herself, to let such possibilities for a toboggan

slide as the dry torrent bed afforded go to waste.

When a thaw and a landslide from the opposite mountain nearly filled the bed of the torrent, till next spring's freshets should wash the way clear again, she only turned her attention to the half-mile long slope to the lake, below the house on the other side, where a giant fir-tree, once blasted by lightning, stood in the middle of the way.

"I will have Thomas and John cut that old tree down," said grandmother, looking down into its distant top, where once a pair of eagles had built their nest of rude sticks. "Yes," said grandmother, "I meant to let that tree stand and have some trumpet-flowers grow over it. But, there, it's too far off to see the blossoms, and I must have it out of the way or they will dash themselves to pieces against it. Thomas!"

But Thomas had gone up the mountain for a load of back-logs; and so grandmother sat down and wrote her letter; and then there came another snow-storm, turning to rain and freezing; and there were the mince-pies to make, and the cran-

berry tarts, and the big pudding, — to be brought in wrapped in blue flames, — and suddenly there was a confusion of gayest, sweetest outcry, and there were the children. And not only the children, but there were Marcia Meyer, with her cheeks so red that you saw plainly her hair was not really red at all; and Bella Brook, wrapped to the nose in the lovely furs that Mrs. Tenterden had given her; and Hester Stanley, with her great black eyes glowing with wonder at the mountain sights; and a pale frail-looking lad in his father's arms, at whom Grandmother Maurice stared half aghast.

For when Marnie had read the letter which her mother had sent to Waterways — Marnie had gone to school at St. Mark's, as she also soon learned to call it — nothing would content her but permission to bring Hester and Marcia and Bella, too. And then Hester whispered to her the unpleasantness of Marcia's leaving Rafe, and it all ended, after a half-dozen purse-depleting telegrams for permitting and for arranging, by Mr. Meyer and Danby taking Rafe in their arms and depositing him in the parlor car and

going with him all the way to Old Benbow, and by Mr. Meyer taking the return train as soon as he saw his boy safely at rest. "For," Marcia had said, "Rafe never has any pleasures, and the mountain air may be the very thing for him, oxygenate his blood, don't you know, and set him on his pins again."

The next day he was no worse for the journey, and was wheeled out into the big parlor—for Grandmother Maurice had had a bed brought down into the music-room for him—and felt, as he looked through the long windows, as if he were in a world of white dreams. Dreams or not, it was very fortunate he was there, for if Rafe had not come to Old Benbow, it is indeed quite possible that the rest of them would never have gone away from it.

Grandmother Maurice, to tell the truth, would much rather have had her own little brood all by themselves. But she realized that they were the happier for being able to show the delights of the old eyrie to the invalid boy, to the irrepressible Marcia, to Bella, whose prairie home was so far away, and to Hester, the little South

Sea islander, who had now seen several winters of snow, but to whom the other children felt it must be forever new, as so indeed it was, and she acquiesced with a very good grace — for Grandmother Maurice.

“I wish Lucia was here,” said Joe.

“Well,” said Grandmother Maurice, “you know it wouldn’t agree with her here.”

“I don’t believe she can slide on those old palace marbles anything like the way she could on that toboggan slide, when it’s finished. It’s like glass now down there.”

“Perhaps you don’t know who Lucia is,” said Rose, with her little old-fashioned politeness, to Hester.

“She is our sister,” said Joe.

“And she’s an Italian princessa, or contessa, or something of the sort,” said Rose.

“You seem to think that it’s a fine thing to be a princessa or contessa, as you call it,” exclaimed grandmother. “How often have I told you that Italy is full of them, asking for coppers!”

“Yes, grandmother,” said Joe. “I know all

about it, and how it's ever so much better to be sovereigns and all that over here; but that doesn't hinder the fact about Lucia, you know, grandmother."

"Joe," said grandmother, "you're just as impertinent now as you were two or three years ago."

"No, grandmother dear, I'm improved; Rose says so, and when Rose says so there's no disputing it."

"Marnie told me all about Lucia," said Hester, hurriedly. "And I told Rafe. And he corresponds with her. He is one of the Shut-ins, you know."

"She says she is half an American child now, and her mother lets her do as the American children do," said Marnie.

"Dear me, dear me!" said grandmother.

"And I had a letter from her yesterday," said Rafe. "Guess what she was doing! Do you want to hear?"

"Oh, of course we do!"

"Certainly," said grandmother.

"Yesterday the air was so soft and clear and

blue,' read Rafe, unfolding the letter, "'that we could see the old Greek ruins far up the mountain terraces across the valley, and the snow was on the hills behind them. And mamma said we would ride over and lunch there, for the ladies and the Monsignore had never been there. And I rode my little white donkey, with Beddu leading him — and so many boughs were budding, and so many birds were singing, and so soft a wind was blowing, and so blue was the sky shining, that it seemed like our spring at home — I mean up on the side of Old Benbow.'"

"Yes," said grandmother, "yes." And she listened more graciously.

"'Only,'" Rafe continued reading, "'it grew very warm, and we met one of the mountain men, and Beddu said he had the evil-eye, and he knew we never should arrive. But we did; and while we were lunching I bent down a bough of the wild orange-tree, and stripped the blossoms off with my right hand, and with the left hand I could have reached the wine-bottles in the snow-drift on the other side. And oh, it was so cool and sweet and high and far up there! It seemed

as if I might see over the side of the earth to my dear people there.' ”

“She's homesick,” said Joe. “You see, she's downright homesick.”

“Nonsense!” said grandmother.

“No, indeed, she is n't,” said Marnie. “She's perfectly happy. She has a father and mother as — almost as good as ours. They're not very rich, but they have beautiful things, and she has everything.”

“Yes,” said Joe. “When they want a statue, they just go out in the garden and dig it up.”

“Rafe can tell you what they did dig up,” said Marcia. And at the word he showed them a little gold coin on his watch-chain, — a coin much battered and worn and covered with strange characters.

“It's a coin the Saracens left there hundreds and hundreds of years ago,” he said. “And she sent it to me for my Christmas.”

“It's exactly like Lucia to be the only one to break my rule of no Christmas presents this year.”

“She did n't know the rule,” said Joe, stoutly,

"and I guess she'd like to be keeping Christmas the way we do. She'd like to be over here fast enough, and going tobogganing with us."

"I meant to have that slide quite ready before you came."

"Oh, it's ready enough," said Larry.

"No, indeed! And I want you all to understand that you are not to attempt it till that huge old tree is cut down. It stands directly in the way, and I can't have you dashing out your brains against it."

"As if we did n't know enough to steer clear of it! At our age!" cried Joe.

"Well, it was very stupid of me to put it off. It's who stops in the house of by-and-by, again, you know, arrives at the house of never."

"When it's done it will be fine. You never went tobogganing, Hester. Oh, it's just like riding on the tail of a comet!"

"Yes. And the slide is so directly underneath that I can see if any mischief happens to the comet. John and Thomas shall go to work on that tree and get it down as soon as may be."

"Grandmother," said Joe, "you are a trump!"

"I suppose you think that is a respectful way of speaking to your old grandmother," she replied, laughing, and smoothing the hair that Joe's embrace had disordered.

"You are not an old grandmother," cried Larry, indignantly. "You are one of us!"

"It's very nice to have a grandmother," said Hester, timidly.

"Bless your dear heart!" And Hester had a warm place in Grandmother Maurice's affections after that.

"Well," she said presently, "Lucia need n't think she is the only one to have picnics at Christmas-time. If we have n't the orange boughs, we have the snow-drifts, and we'll make the most of them to-day, for no one knows about to-morrow. It does look a little dubious, to be sure," said grandmother, going to the window. "There's a shroud on Mistletoe, — that always means more snow. But I don't believe it will amount to anything before midnight. Where's the almanac? What time does the tide turn down on the coast?" And they all hung round her while she studied the cabalistic signs.

"About this time," said Joe, "expect—a—sleigh-ride across the lake to the blue cave and the old mill. That's what it says. I'll go and tell Thomas to put the horses into the big sleigh by half-past one, sha'n't I, grandmother?" and he straightway disappeared.

"And I'll tell Maria to have the dinner earlier," said grandmother.

"Well, then, how many of you are there?" she said when she came back.

"Oh, we can all pile in," said Marcia.

"How are we to arrange that, Rafe?"

"If Larry sits on the back seat with you, ma'am, and Rose and little Kate between you, then Hester and Marnie and Bella in the middle seat, and Joe and Marcia and Thomas in the front."

"Let me see. Are there any more?"

"Why, Rafe, are n't you going?"

"Are n't you going, Rafe?"

"Oh, it will spoil all the fun if you don't go, Rafe!"

"You'll be so lonesome, Rafe."

"I? Oh no. It's plenty for me to see you

off and see you home again. No, indeed. I promised papa to take no risks. And Danby will stay with me, you know."

"But you can be all wrapped up."

"I couldn't sit up long enough, and you'd have to come home before you wanted to, and that would trouble me. And then you forget," said Rafe, with his rare smile, "that I'm one of the Shut-ins, and used to it, you know."

"No one can be used to going without pleasure," cried Joe.

"I don't go without. It's a great pleasure to me just to be here, and lie and look out on these hills."

"Rafe," whispered Hester, kneeling on the hassock by the lounge, "I don't really care about going. Can't I stay with you?"

"No, indeed," said Rafe. "I should n't enjoy it one bit. I am going to write a long letter. And then I shall read a little, and then I shall watch for you to come. It will be great fun to see you far off down there on the lake, and coming nearer and nearer and higher and higher. First you will be ants, and then you

will be birds, and then you will be people. And then I shall hear the bells, and then the voices, and you will all tumble in rosy and cold, and we shall have a big fire, and I shall hear all about it."

"I say, Rafe," said Joe, "I never shall be as good as you are, but I'll stay at home with you."

"No, you won't, then," said Rafe.

And here dinner was announced.

"Well," said grandmother, as soon as they had finished the happy noisy feast, "there's no time to lose if we're to be back before dark. 'The dark comes early down to-night.' Maria will have the hot-water bottles and the hot soap-stones. You want your leggings and mufflers and all your wraps. Rafe! you shall have these books of autographs to turn over. I don't let every one touch them. Come, are you all ready?" and with a great deal of confusion and exclamation and commiseration and regretting, and running back for last words to Rafe, the big sleigh was off at last.

Rafe lifted himself on his elbows as he lay on the lounge, and watched them winding away

down the hill, appearing and disappearing, till at last, no bigger than a wasp to his unaccustomed sight, they dashed out upon the broad frozen lake. Then he wished it were blue sky and sunshine, and made Danby put some light wood on the fire-dogs, and look out to see which way the wind was blowing, and felt all right when he found that it was blowing south, south with only a little east in it. And then he spread his tablet and wrote a letter to Lucia, and realized that the smell of the spicy green which Maria and John and Jane were hanging up began to make it really seem like Christmas Eve. And at last he opened the big book of autographs that it had been one of Grandmother Maurice's long winter-day amusements to set in order, and the first thing he saw was a page of the manuscript of Sir Walter Scott. And then, as he laid his hand on the leaf where the Wizard of the North had laid his hand before him, up sprang the oaks of Sherwood Forest; and bold Robin Hood blew his horn; and the Black Knight rode along with the chance sunbeam glancing on his armor; and Allan-a-Dale's tune rang through

the recesses of the wood, while Wamba, the son of Witless, trolled the refrain; and this great laugh, it was the voice of Friar Tuck.

Full of his pleasant thoughts, Rafe absently turned two or three leaves, and in an instant almost a thousand years had fled — for was he not with Jules Verne beneath the sea? “Oh, this is like magic!” said Rafe, gleefully; for the leaves fluttered between his fingers and fell open on a page where lay a note written by Herschel when he was at the Cape of Good Hope measuring the stars in the southern heavens, and straightway Rafe was off like a witch on a broomstick through black midnight air among stars and moons and meteors. “Oh!” cried Rafe, aloud, “how much better this is — the writing they really wrote, with some of their own lives in it — than just the miserable names people send for your collection, with some of the annoyance you give in them! I wonder if there is one of Washington’s here?” For Grandmother Maurice’s collection was on a scale that would have allowed him to expect to find the script of King Solomon, if there had been such

a thing to find. It was while Rafe hung over the quaint and precise handwriting of the Father of our Country, and felt himself proudly crossing the Delaware amidst blocks of ice making way for him, that he found himself wondering why the ink had faded so, and all at once became aware that the light was dim; that there was a strange hustling and bustling in the air; that it was really snowing; that indeed it must have begun to snow large soft flakes some time since; and that the wind was rising, rising, and blowing round the gables, — blowing from moment to moment more and more, as if it blew from the regions of perpetual storm.

And there were Grandmother Maurice and the children out in it! And he had been so absorbed he had not noticed how late it was growing. And he really felt for a little as if he were somehow to blame. For Rafe was usually attending so carefully to every one's welfare, that having forgotten all the world in his own pleasure for an hour or two seemed to him a great piece of selfishness; and all the more when he saw that Jane and Danby were looking out

anxiously, that Maria had bound up her face for the toothache, which she always did when she was anxious, Marnie had once told him; and that John had gone down the mountain a little way to see if he could spy the sleigh on the lake.

But the gale of driving snow made it impossible to see ten yards ahead, and the atmosphere was already almost like twilight, and John labored back breathlessly.

"I don't know how it is they'll be getting up this hill," he gasped.

"Does it often storm so here?" called Rafe, as John and a gust of wind and snow together burst in at the side door.

"When it do be blowing a southeaster," said John.

"Oh, sorra me!" cried Jane. "Sure, if you'd tould me I was bringing the childer up here till their deaths —"

"Hould yer blathering tongue!" cried John.

And while their concern found vent in sharp words, Rafe waited, all but holding his breath, his lounge rolled into the bay-window, with the

servants clustering behind him, while the swift mountain storm grew wilder and wilder, and the air darker and darker, all their hearts beating so that each felt the other could hear.

"They do be losing their way, so they do," said John, at last. "I'd a-known they wud, wid that bye Thomas a-driving. If the missis'd a-taken me, I'd not have gone a step, so I would n't. But ye'd as sune move the rock o' Cashel as the missis when she's fixed."

"Do you suppose they have really lost their way?" whispered Rafe, terror-struck. "How dark it is getting!"

"It looks so," said Danby.

"And the little children — they'll be so frightened — and Hester — and oh, my own dear sister Marcia is there!" and they all strained their eyes through the gloom.

"Oh, Danby! Oh, John! Isn't there anything we can do?" cried Rafe again, in a little while, when it had grown quite dark, and their own breathless silence made the storm roaring overhead seem roaring all the louder. "It's terrible to be staying here doing nothing. Can't we put

lamps in all the windows that they may see where the house is, and head this way?"

"It 'ud take more than lamps in the windows to light this murk," said John. "It 'ud take a bonfire big as the Dedannans kindled on the hill of Knockruish, by the same token, and that would n't do it."

"A bonfire!" cried Rafe. "Oh, Danby! Oh, John! We can have it! You can get down there to the big tree, can't you? You can try! It's hollow — it's dead and dry and full of pitch — it will burn like touchwood!"

Meanwhile Grandmother Maurice and the children had wound down the mountain-side and dashed out upon the lake, whose hard shield rang under the horses' feet, with great jingling of bells, and much crying and calling and laughing, Marnie busy showing the various sights of cliff and scaur, and telling their old Indian legends to Bella and Marcia and Hester, helped by Joe, the little children singing their kindergarten songs, and Larry silently watching the leaden shadows among the white hills, and looking for gods and monsters in their great outlines.

"Now you can give them their head," said grandmother to Thomas; and the horses fairly flew across the lake, and grandmother enjoyed the swift motion and the exhilarating flight as much as any of them. The horses themselves appeared to enjoy it most of all, arching their necks, and flinging out their feet, and only with difficulty answering the rein when, at grandmother's quick exclamation, Thomas pulled them in.

"I declare," she said; "I do believe— Is n't it snowing?"

"Oh, never mind, grandmother!" cried Joe. "What if it is? Just a couple of flakes."

"Maybe it is only a flurry," said grandmother.

"It's the way of the bad ones, mum," said Thomas, touching his bear-skin with the whip-handle.

"But I must show Hester the cave, grandmother," said Joe.

"And the mill-wheel," urged Marnie.

"Yes, grandmother," said Larry. "Just let us look at the blue light in the cave, and see if it is n't as blue as the grotto Lucia wrote about."

"It's bluer," said grandmother. And they drove straight over to the other side of the lake, and in among great water-worn rocks at the foot of the spur where the shrunken stream had left ice-blocks that made the translucent roof of a sort of dim twilighted cave, in whose farther end the frozen drippings formed a stalagmite in the shape of a throne.

"It makes every winter and it melts every summer," said Marnie. "But we might have known there wouldn't be any blue light when the sun was n't shining."

"It takes sunlight to make blue shadows out of snow," said Larry.

"But there's the echo still," said Marnie. And she began to sing, "Angels ever bright and fair," and presently another voice, and another, a dozen far sweet reedy voices, were warbling it after her. But suddenly she stopped, and waited while the echoes went on, one warbling after another, till far and far and faint away they too stopped as suddenly. "The echo's so dull, there must be something the matter with the air," she said.

"A lot of snow in it, miss," said Thomas.

"We — we — really — don't you think we'd better turn? Grandmother, don't let Joe get out." For Joe was preparing to climb the throne and make a speech.

"Joe," called his grandmother, "if you get out we shall go and leave you."

"Then I won't get out," said Joe.

"There's a squall coming, and the horses will have all they can do to make their way back."

"Echo!" cried Marnie. "Say, shall we go home?"

"Home," called all the echoes. "Home, home, home!"

"It does seem too bad to leave them here, doesn't it?" said Marcia. "The white fairy things."

"And you won't see the mill-wheel all loaded with ice, like a great ghost," said Larry.

"Now you may turn, Thomas," said grandmother. "There's plenty of room. There we are. Let them have their way, and see what time they'll make." And back they went; the wind, which they had hardly noticed when it

was behind them, blowing now in their faces, and a thick cloud of damp snow blinding and bewildering them.

"And here I am," thought Grandmother Maurice, "with a parcel of other people's children!"

Grandmother Maurice seldom talked much when she was worried. She saw that the horses were making all the speed they could. But she was very still.

"Dear, dear!" thought grandmother, soon again. "As if I weren't old enough to know better!"

Joe began to whistle "Moneymusk," and Marcia joined, and presently Larry made a third.

"Oh, don't!" cried Marnie. "It makes me feel as if something were going to happen when you whistle to keep your courage up." And they left off, as she did, because the wind whisked the sound off their lips. "Grandmother!" screamed Marnie, "we can't see either shore! Are you sure you're going right, Thomas?"

"No, miss, I ain't sure of nothing," was what Thomas seemed to say, as the wind snatched the words.

And at that, Bella, who had been thinking how warm and cheerful they all were round Mrs. Tenterden's fireside, where she might have been, with the soft red lights and the fragrant flowers, began to cry.

"Before I'd be a baby, Bella!" Marcia tried to say.

But Hester drew her arm round Bella. "You lay your head on my shoulder," she said, with her mouth on Bella's ear. "God is with us just as much as if we were on shore." And they bent their heads down together in a gust of wind that almost took their breath away.

"How could I have been such a fool?" groaned grandmother. "When I saw the storm coming, too!"

"Good experience for us, grandmother," shouted Joe, leaning back towards her. "I guess the horses know the way. Thomas does n't."

"Thomas!"

"No, mum," said Thomas, turning round in his seat so that she could hear his voice, for the wind shrieked now between the hills and from cliff to cliff. "No, mum. And I'm mistook or we've

been round the lake once and again — wot with the snow thickening and the sudding dusk. And there's an air-hole, there certingly is; and I — I don't know wot we'll do!"

"I do," said grandmother. "You come here, and I'll take the reins myself. There, that gust has passed, there'll be a little pause in the storm. It seems as if I had driven long enough round here to know my way by instinct. I'm sure the horses ought to."

"The hosses is 'most beat out, mum," said Thomas. "I'll buckle on their blankets and lead them a bit. You stay quiet, mum, begging parding. It's no use letting the cold into the sleigh."

"If it was n't getting as dark as a beggar's pocket, we should find our bearings."

"And the wind's that shifty and beastly, you can't tell where you be by it." And talking and grumbling to himself, as grandmother talked and grumbled to herself, for no one could hear either of them, Thomas led the horses on a little way.

"Oh, how quickly it grew dark!" cried Marnie, in the lull.

"That's just the way it does at home, down in the islands," said Hester. "It's daylight; and all at once it's dark—but such beautiful soft dark, with two or three great stars and the flower-breaths."

"Yes, tell us about it now," said Marcia, mockingly. "It seems so commonplace and safe and pleasant to hear about out here lost on the lake in a storm."

"Why, Marcia," said Marnie, "we're not lost. Grandmother'll get us safely home again."

"I don't know about that," said grandmother. "If there were anything under the canopy to go by, anything we could relate to anything else—a light anywhere to follow up—why, then, we might get somewhere. It seems to be dangerous to stir, now I think of that air-hole. I don't know but we may have to stay here all night." And at that little Kate lifted up her voice and wept.

"Hush, hush!" said Larry. The gale had sighed down to a long lull before breaking out again, for even storms sometimes seem to weary of their own violence. "If any one said, 'Let's

go down to the lake and camp out,' you'd think it great sport."

"But we'd have a tent of hemlock boughs, then," said Joe, "and a fire, and —"

"Oh, I'm so cold, grandmother," whimpered Rose.

"I think it would be rather fun to stay here all night," said Joe.

"And be frozen stiff by morning," said Larry.

"Oh, grandmother!" roared little Kate, "I'm afraid — I'm afraid!"

"Oh, it's so dark!" cried Rose. "I thought it was white out in a snow-storm. Oh, grandmother, how dark it is! How quick it got dark! Oh, Larry, do you — do you — think — the world is coming to an end?"

"It's a pretty sort of Christmas Eve we're having," said Marnie. "And you're all company! And grandmother was going to take us round the mountain to the village—it's only a mile that way—to ring the new chimes she has given to the church there."

"There'll be no bell-ringing for us to-night," said grandmother. "If some one had the sense

to ring them now, we might tell where we are. I wonder it does n't occur to John."

And then Marnie burst into tears.

"I declare," said Marcia, "if it was n't for Joe and me, what a melancholy party we should be! I rather like it now."

"It's nothing to like," growled grandmother. "Come! Can't the horses go on now?"

"Go on where, mum? It's no sort of use to try," said Thomas; "the wind's beginning to sing again."

"Then you get back to your seat again and tuck in the robes, and we'll wait on Providence. They say Providence takes care of children and fools. And I'm sure here's a chance. There never was a bigger fool than I! And these delicate little creatures, and that South Sea Island child, and my own darlings."

"Grandmother," said Larry, "it is n't your fault. We shouldn't have given you any peace if you had n't come."

"What if—what if—the wolves—" said little Kate, with chattering teeth.

"There is n't one within a hundred miles of

us," said grandmother, very decidedly. But there was an ominous silence in that sleigh, for the stoutest heart stood still.

The wind blew up a long stream again. A hundred voices seemed shrieking with it. It pressed against them like a great shoulder. The thick snow was blinding; the darkness impenetrable and suffocating.

"I ought to be put in leading strings," said grandmother. "Well, Thomas," she exclaimed then, making him hear as well as she could, "we can't see one another, we can't hear one another. Turn the horses away from the wind, and we'll pile the rugs up round the children till the moon rises. She rises before midnight, and will be some help."

"If we ain't all dead first," muttered Thomas.

"It must be past five by this."

"Then," said Hester, "if we're going to bed out here in the storm, we had better say our prayers."

"Look!" cried Marcia, suddenly. "What is that?"

"What?" "Where?" "Which way?" came

a chorus of replies, rising shrilly over the storm.

"There! Directly before us," she screamed. "Up in the air — far off. Oh! oh!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Grandmother Maurice; "it's that very Providence. The shining of a flaming fire by night."

For there, blazing up to the sky, was a pillar, a tower of flame, throwing light far round itself through the tempest, every snow-flake of which looked like a spark of fire in its illumination, a sort of splendid bonfire that the wind fanned into double glory. And, as if sketched upon the sky, there stood out above and behind it the Maurice homestead itself on its hillside, and among its snow-filled gardens the house, the bright light reflected from every window.

Never anything looked so beautiful to all those eager, half-blinded eyes as that far-away phantom of a house gleaming through a haze of storm in the light of the great burning tree.

Thomas did not wait for a second glance, but shook the reins and the whip, and the horses reared and plunged and went at a run; and in

ten minutes they were away up on the mountain road, shaking off showers of bell-notes as they went slipping along the old familiar way at last.

"It's Rafe!" cried Marcia. "I might have known he'd find out a way to help."

"And he's cleared the toboggan slide for us," answered Joe. "When that tree's done burning, there won't be a bump left."

And then, all silent and half breathless, they held their heads down away from the wind while the horses dashed up and along. And just as they stopped at the longed-for door there came faintly, sweetly, on the long sough of the wind the tune of the new chimes from the village round the mountain, perhaps reflected from the storm-cloud, the ghost, the dream of a tune ringing in the Christmas Eve.

"Well, grandmother," said the undaunted Joe, as they trooped round the great hall fire that John and Danby had heaped, "you see we have our Christmas presents, after all."

"How is that?" asked grandmother, quickly.

"Our lives! our lives!" cried Joe.

"Well, then, if God has given you your lives

over again for a Christmas present, it befits you to use them as if it were always Christmas Eve."

"Oh!" said Hester, "I really will."

"I think you will," said grandmother. "We'll have supper now if the fright has n't demoralized Maria. What were you frightened about, Maria? Didn't you suppose the horses knew the way home? Did you think anything could happen when I was along? You were right. It was a dark moment for me out there in the storm with a parcel of other people's children. My lad," said Grandmother Maurice, going over to Rafe's lounge, which Danby had built up with cushions, and where Marcia was hugging him hysterically — "my lad," said grandmother, taking his thin face between her hands and kissing it, "you have learned that sometimes those who seem to be shut away from any work are those that do the most. We shouldn't be here tonight but for you! I think," said grandmother, turning to the others, "as long as we have had our Christmas-tree — and the most magnificent Christmas-tree I ever saw — that now we will have a little service of song after supper. The

house smells like a church, anyway, in all this balsam-fir and hemlock. And I don't know what that voice like a flute was given to you for, Marnie, if it was n't to sing to-night, and every night, 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow !' "

"I hope there's something nice for supper," said Joe.

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